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BUFFALO BILL'S DEATH-KNELL;

Or, THE RED HAND RIDERS OF THE ROCKIES.



"WELL, THAT IS LIKE READING ONE'S OWN OBITUARY! ONLY I'M NOT YET DEAD."

Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell;

OR,

THE RED HAND RIDERS OF THE ROCKIES.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOUT'S DEATH WARNING.

"Well! that is like reading one's own obituary!

"Only I'm not yet dead, and before I pass in my chips some of those who put this ghostly warning and death-knell to Buffalo Bill may cross into the Land of Silence before he does."

So spoke a man who had ridden up to a cross made of hewn timber, and which stood upon a summit that commanded an extensive view of the country surrounding: a wild, unsettled land where lurked only death and danger.

The cross stood just off the trail, near a spring about which were the signs of a camp, and it had been firmly planted there for a purpose that was two-fold.

At its base were the lonely mounds marking the last resting-place of several dead persons who had met their death there on the stage trail that ran near, and it had been erected by the comrades of the fallen driver of the coach, in his memory and to his passengers who had lost their lives at the same time.

There was cut into the wooden cross the word

"BEWARE,"

and beneath it was the name of the driver, with a warning to his slayers that their doom would yet be at the end of a rope.

But, the horseman who now gazed upon the cross saw that its wording had been changed from what it was when placed there.

More skillfully cut into the wood than was the original, he read the "Beware" changed in its wording to suit another than the guilty.

He beheld at either end of the arm of the cross, most skillfully carved, a Death's Head and Cross-bones, while cut into the center was a smaller cross, defacing the original lettering, and in its place he read:

"BUFFALO BILL

"BEWARE!

"Take notice, W. F. Cody—Buffalo Bill the scout—that, as you had this cross erected here to the memory of your pard, Six-Horse Sam, who drove this trail, and as a warning that his slayers should yet die at the rope end, we, the

RED HAND RIDERS

now sound your death-knell, and take solemn oath to bury your body at the base of this cross before another year has rolled by.

"To save your life give up your hunt for the band of road-agents known as the Red Hand Riders."

The man who stood before the cross reading the warning cut into it, was one to command attention and admiration anywhere.

His face and bearing were distinguished, for, as upright as a soldier, he was over six-feet in height and his form was both elegant and indicative of great strength, quickness and endurance.

He was clad in frontier garb, with top-boots and large slouch hat, and wore a belt of arms.

His hair was dark, waving and worn long, and but lately shaven he had a mustache and imperial which gave him a military air, while his features were perfect, expressive and strongly marked.

His horse stood at his side, equipped for a long trail, and with a rifle hanging from the saddle-horn: a worthy animal to bear such a rider, for the man was Buffalo Bill, one now known the wide world over, and whose deeds of daring, whose life of romance and thrilling adventure upon the frontier in days gone by have made him famous as a hero of the Wild West.

Dismounting at the cross, Buffalo Bill stood gazing upon it in silence for fully a

minute, after uttering the words that open this story, a story founded upon real incidents in the life of the noted scout, and telling of those who now live in history.

At last, with a sigh, the scout mused aloud:

"It is said that a threatened man is long-lived, and it may be so.

"Certainly, I manage to keep above ground in spite of many threats made to kill me.

"But I must look to it that this threat is not carried out, for the Red Hand Riders are a desperate lot and would be only too glad to kill me.

"They have vowed to drive me away, or kill me, so I take up the war with them from to-day, and as they have begun it I will be the last to end it, for now I shall avenge my old pard, Six-Horse Sam, whom they murdered here—oh!"

And with the exclamation from the scout's lips mingled the crack of a rifle, and he staggered back and fell heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER II.

THE GAME OF DEATH.

THE puff of smoke from behind a distant rock, had caught the eye of the scout just as the bullet came and the report followed.

The bit of lead had been well-aimed and a stain of red over the right temple showed where it had struck or passed, and Buffalo Bill lay as motionless as though it had pierced his brain.

His horse, startled by the shot, had at first sprung away, but now turned, trotted up to his fallen rider and stood gazing down upon him, snorting in terror and apparently in anger at his death.

A moment passed; then out of the thicket sheltering the group of rocks from the midst of which had come the shot, advanced two men, each with a rifle in hand.

They were dressed in buckskin leggings, gray-woolen shirts, sombreros, top boots and wore masks, while their hands were covered with red gloves.

Both were well armed, and came forward, at first, cautiously—their eyes upon the fallen scout; and then with more rapid stride when one of them said:

"Owl, your shot did the work, for he is dead. Sorry, for that will disappoint the band; they all wished to hang him."

"Yes, but he was too dangerous to allow him to escape, Hawk, and so I aimed to kill," answered the other.

"Well, it will raise a terrible row for awhile, and the soldiers will hunt us hard, for Buffalo Bill is the idol of the army; but after awhile it will blow over and we will rake in the gold!"

"You bet we will! and I will be the dandy of the outfit, for it was my bullet that brought down the dreaded Buffalo Bill. Why, Hawk, it ought to make me chief, if Captain Eagle gets killed."

"Which Captain Eagle won't, for he bears a charmed life, as we have all thought that Buffalo Bill did."

The two outlaws now advanced more rapidly toward the prostrate scout, and, as they drew near, Owl called out:

"Squarely in the temple, Hawk, for see where my bullet cut its way."

"A splendid shot, Owl, and— Devils! look out!"

The exclamation was caused by the sudden rush of Buffalo Bill's horse directly upon them, his white teeth revealed, his eyes flashing with revengeful fury.

"Don't kill him! He is too rich a prize," shouted Owl as Hawk was drawing his revolver.

The warning was unheeded, as Hawk saw his danger and threw his revolver forward to fire.

But, the finger never pulled trigger, as the man dropped dead in his tracks ere the report of a pistol died away, and, with a cry of horror, Owl turned to see who had fired the shot only to behold Buffalo Bill suddenly rise to his feet, revolver in hand!

He uttered a cry of terror and half raised his rifle, but with a bound the enraged horse was upon him, his shoulder grasped in his gleaming teeth, and the iron-shod hoofs striking at the body of the helpless and terrified man.

A few bounds and Buffalo Bill had grasped the rein of the horse, while he cried sternly:

"Let him go, Lucifer! let go, I say!"

The horse released his grip and the man sunk helplessly upon the ground.

Seeing that he was unconscious the scout turned and patted his horse affectionately, talking to him in endearing tones which the trained animal seemed fully to understand and appreciate, for he uttered a low whinny, yet glanced down at the victim of his rage as though wondering why his master had not allowed him to finish him.

"I guess you've done for him, Lucifer, for which I am sorry, for I wanted him to live and get from him information he could have been forced to give.

"You were vicious in your attack on him, old horse, but, as it was to avenge me, it is all right.

"Now go and nip grass, while I see if there is any life in him, for I know yonder cut-throat is dead, as I sent a bullet through his heart.

"Why, I am dizzy myself from the effects of the bullet; it was a close call, for an eighth of an inch more and it would not have glanced as it did, but must have killed me," and the scout wiped away the blood from the gash over his temple, and which, cutting to the bone, had momentarily stunned him.

Lucifer, with his master alive and able to take care of himself, obeyed his injunction and went off to crop grass, while Buffalo Bill, after a glance at the man he had shot, to be assured that he was dead, went to where the other lay, and bent over him.

The Owl—as his comrade had called him—was breathing hard, but lay unconscious, the hoofs of the horse having evidently struck him hard in the breast.

Taking the mask off his face Buffalo Bill uttered an exclamation of surprise, as though he recognized the man, and then walked rapidly over and unmasked the other.

"I don't know you, but I do know your pard, whom I never suspected of being what he is.

"It will be best for him to die now, for if he lives he will go, later, at the end of a rope.

"I will make him as comfortable as I can and ride to the stage-station for help.

"They played a deadly game upon me, but we won, didn't we, Lucifer?"

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING OUTLAW.

BUFFALO BILL rode rapidly to the stage station, distant a score of miles from the scene which had so nearly proven fatal to him.

The station was one of a line upon the stage trail which led to a frontier military post, a settlement and mining-camp, and weekly coaches were run in spite of the danger from Indians and road-agents, the latter being particularly energetic in their hunt for gold gained by the hard toil of honest men.

At the relay stage station were two men, and telling them what had occurred, Buffalo Bill got one of them to return with him, carrying a cart used for hauling wood down from the mountains.

The return was made rapidly, and upon arriving at the spot where he had left the wounded road-agent, to the great surprise of the scout he was not there!

There lay the dead body of the man whom the scout had killed, but the one Lucifer had attacked, was gone beyond all doubt.

"Well, I thought it was a sure case of die, with that fellow, Nip," said the scout, and he added:

"Lucifer had a terrible grip on his shoulder and struck at him savagely with his fore hoofs until I thought his whole body was crushed in, but as I wanted to learn something from him before he died, I placed him just here, made him comfortable, and went after you; but now where is he?"

"Skipped," said Nip, quietly.

"There is no doubt of that, but he must have had some aid, and now to find out all we can about his mysterious disappearance."

The scout then walked over to the body of the dead Hawk and saw that his weapons and all else he had had of value about him had been taken, for Bill had touched noth-

ing before going to the station, not expecting any one else to come along in that wild land during his absence and feeling convinced that the man Lucifer had attacked was beyond the power of self-aid.

Setting to work, in his skillful way of hunting down a mystery, he began a circuit of the hilltop in search of trails or signs and soon came upon the tracks of two horses going and coming from the spot where the cross was erected.

Following the tracks up the hill, he soon found where the two horses had been hitched in a thicket, while their riders went into ambush for him.

"They saw me coming, and so laid for me," muttered the scout.

Then he saw where the horses had retraced their trail, and failing to find any other tracks leading to and from the hill, other than this one, Buffalo Bill said:

"Nip, that fellow evidently played possum on me, and did it well, for he was not as badly hurt as I supposed."

"He just waited until I left for the station and then he shook himself together and started on the jump to escape."

"First he robbed his dead pard, and then mounted his horse and dug out, taking the other animal with him."

"That's it, Bill," acquiesced Nip.

"Well, I'm sorry to have brought you here for nothing."

"It hain't for nothin', Pard Bill, for I has seen that you did yer best, and this galoot is ter be planted, so I'll set to work, and then we'll return to the station."

"No, I will go on the trail of those two horses, and find out where it leads to."

"Don't do it, Bill!" urged the other.

"Why not?"

"I has read that warning, thar on ther cross."

"What of that?"

"Them Red Hands means what they says, and they'll down you sart'in ef you goes on the trail."

"Why, pard, if I heeded warnings I would have been driven away from the frontier long ago."

"Those Red Hands are a bad lot, and they hope to frighten me off by reading my death-knell; but instead of going I shall devote my time, hereafter, to running them down, for I owe them a grudge for killing Six-Horse Sam and several other of my pards."

"No, I'll not heed the warning, Nip, until I see the end of it," and Buffalo Bill spoke with a quiet determination which with him meant so much.

"You knows best, Pard Cody, but to me that warning means sart'in death to you, as I said, and I wishes you would heed it; but, as I sees you is dead set on not minding it, I know it's no use to talk."

"Oh, yes, I shall heed it so well that I shall at once fight it to the bitter end."

"Now we will bury this body," and the two set to work, with a spade and pick brought from the station to dig a grave.

It was soon done, the body was wrapped in a blanket and placed in the grave, which was at once filled up, Buffalo Bill remarking quietly:

"Nip, it is surprising how death changes my feelings toward a foe, for, though I killed that man I have no hatred against him, only pity and respect for the dead. But, it is growing late so I must be off," and with a grasp of the stock-tender's hand the scout mounted Lucifer, struck the trail of the road-agent's horses, and rode away like one who had a determined purpose in view.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS SERGEANT.

THERE was considerable excitement at Fort Advance, the military post at the terminus of the stage trail that ran by the cross on the hilltop on which Buffalo Bill had read his death-knell.

The excitement was not caused by an Indian outbreak, nor the news of a hold-up by the Red Hand Riders, but from an event that was to happen in the fort, and to which all were looking forward with the deepest interest, from the commandant, Colonel Carr, to the most insignificant personage at the fort.

The fact was that there was a sergeant at

the fort who was looked upon as a very mysterious personage, and his name was Louis Fallon.

He had joined the army some years before as a private soldier, entering the cavalry, but, it was at once seen that he was fully competent to command the company as well as any of its officers, though he made no display of his military knowledge and had very little to say of himself.

Six feet in height, handsome, courtly in bearing and a man of education, he was called by his comrades the "Soldier Adonis."

He had ridden into the fort one day bringing a wounded officer, who, while out hunting, had been attacked by Indians.

He was on his way to the fort, he had said, saw the officer's danger, went to his rescue and saved him, after having killed a couple of the red-skins and put the others to flight.

Then he brought the officer, who was quite severely wounded to the fort.

All he had to say for himself was that he had been a miner, had met with no luck to speak of, and wished to enlist.

His courage, splendid physique and age, for he was about thirty-five apparently, were all in his favor, and so he was assigned to the cavalry, and at once made his mark as a soldier.

It was discovered, after he had served half a year, that he was a fine scout, that he was daring to recklessness, and that he was a very superior man, one who became the idol of his comrades and a great favorite with his officers.

He was made a corporal for gallant services, then won a sergeant's stripes for saving a comrade's life, and soon after was appointed post ordnance-sergeant, which rank he held at the time this story opens.

But, the cause of excitement in the fort was that Sergeant Louis Fallon had received a letter which caused him to at once seek an interview with Colonel Carr.

The letter informed him that his daughter, Lucille, a maiden of seventeen, was coming to the fort to visit him for an indefinite time.

Mrs. Carr had at once offered, in a kindly way, to secure for the young girl a place in some officer's family as a nurse, but the sergeant had said in explanation:

"I thank you, madam, but my daughter has just finished her education at a fashionable boarding-school in New York, and, though I have been parted from her for long years, now that her mother is dead she wishes to come and live with me, and I beg to say that though she is a sergeant's child, she yet has quite a large fortune in her own right, and it is under her personal control, young as she is, so that my desire was to ask you, Colonel Carr, if I could secure quarters where I could make her comfortable and live with her there?"

"By all means, Fallon, and anything I can do to make her comfortable it will give me pleasure to do."

"When will she arrive?"

"By next week's coach, sir," answered the sergeant.

"And I will also lend a helping hand, sergeant," answered Mrs. Carr, and the sergeant took his departure.

"That man was born and raised a gentleman, wife," said the colonel after the sergeant's departure.

"There is no doubt of that, for there is no officer at the fort who has more courtly manners, and I learn that he buys from the post trader German, French and Spanish books, all of which he reads fluently."

"Yes, and he handles a sword with wonderful skill; he can drill a regiment as well as I can; he sits a horse like a West Pointer and is working for a commission I am sure, and which I will do all in my power to aid him to get."

"I hope so, and I confess to a curiosity to see this daughter of his, who he says has a fortune—a sergeant's daughter who is an heiress," said Mrs. Carr.

"I hope she will not be made to too keenly feel her position, educated and refined as she must be."

"He will guard her from that, I trust," and the lady went out to consult some of her friends upon the coming visitor, the sergeant's daughter.

The news soon went the rounds of the

fort, that the daughter of Sergeant Fallon was coming to the fort, that she was rich in her own right, would live in quarters furnished by her father, and as gossip always goes, it was added that she was young, very beautiful, highly educated, and other stories were told until all were anxious to greet the fair visitor and bid her welcome.

The sergeant went calmly on with his duties, secured a pleasantly situated cabin, had it furnished as well as could be expected, hired a soldier's wife to do the cooking, and awaited the coming of the young girl who was all in all to him, and who was expected to arrive on Jack Jessop's coach, which was due at sunset the following day.

CHAPTER V.

THE SERGEANT'S DAUGHTER.

THE coach for Fort Advance pulled out of the last settlement on the trail until it reached the mining country over which the military post was the guardian, as well as of the settlers who had boldly made homes in the adjacent valleys.

The trail was a long one, rugged and dangerous.

It was a trail that few even of the bold Overland drivers dare attempt at night, and along its way were a number of mounds marking the last resting-place of those who had been killed either by Indians or road-agents, for, as the coaches often carried valuable treasure, there were outlaws ever ready to hold it up.

Then, too, the trail was so rugged that only the most skillful of drivers could carry a six-horse team over it in safety.

The relay stations were few in number and far between, and save these not a hut was visible, not a human being was encountered on the trail, unless it was an outlaw or a red-skin, the very ones to avoid.

But, Jack Jessop was one that knew how to handle the wildest team; could drive the Fort Advance trail by night if need be; and was a man who had heard deadly bullets whistle and had felt the burning lead enter his own flesh.

He had faced death time and again, and had a "record" of men he had placed under the sod, so was dreaded, peaceful looking and quiet though he was.

He had been the first man to take a coach through after Six-Horse Sam had been killed by the Red Hands, and though time and again warned that he would die on the box some day, always started off from his post with a cheery:

"See you again, pards."

So he had left his post in the little settlement one morning early, and had started upon the day's run to Fort Advance, with just three relay stations on the way, the center one being that which Buffalo Bill had visited for help when he had met the two masked outlaws at what had been named "Monument Hill" on account of the cross erected there to Six-Horse Sam, and which the Red Hand Riders had converted into a warning-post for the scout.

Three passengers were inside the coach—an army officer and two Eastern men, from their appearance, and upon the box by the side of Jack Jessop was a young girl.

Upon the coach register she was down as Miss Lucille Fallon, and her destination was Fort Advance.

She had preferred a box seat to one inside, had made few night rides, taking the journey quietly, and seemed to enjoy every mile of the way.

Each driver she had met with had soon warmed up under the influence of her beauty and sweet ways, and she had appeared to understand that a good cigar was a comfort on a drive, and so had brought along a supply for those who were to be her comrades on the long trail.

"I don't smoke myself," she said with a mischievous smile to Jack Jessop, as she took her seat by his side, "but will you not have a cigar?"

Jack flushed up like a school-boy, took the cigar, accepted the match handed to him by his fair companion, and with the first puff said:

"This hain't no Wild West cigar, miss."

"No; I bought them in New York, and I have more when you wish them."

"We reach Fort Advance to-night, I believe?"

"Yes, miss, by sunset; but, I'll push 'em ter run in a little before, so you'll git thar in good daylight, for it's dismal runnin' inter a place by night for ther fu'st time."

"You are very kind, sir."

"No, I was told ter look arter you, miss, for I takes it yer is ther sergeant's daughter."

"Yes, I am Lucille Fallon."

"Do you know my father?"

"I does, miss, and a braver man I never seen. He run through with me for a dozen times over as guard, when the road-agents got too wicked, and there was no scare in him."

"Yes, my father has always had a record for bravery. I hope he is well."

"Couldn't be better, miss, and as anxious to see you as though you was his lady-love."

"But you is plucky to make this run, as the Red Hands and Injuns has been awful bothersome of late."

"And who are the Red Hands?"

"Wal, miss, that are a hard question to answer, more than to say that they is a lawless band that goes by the name of ther Red Hand Riders, ther Red Roughs, and ther Outlawed Saddle Kings."

"Jist who they is there is nobody outside of the band that knows, for some says they is desperado cowboys, others that they is ill-luck miners and again it is said that they is settlers who prefers to rob folks to work in."

"They calls themselves Birds o' Prey, and goes by ther name o' birds, ther capt'in being named Eagle."

"They goes masked, and wears red gloves, and has been guilty o' more cruel deeds than any band o' outlaws on ther border; but somehow they always gits off free, exceptin' last week when Buffalo Bill kilt one of 'em, and went off on ther trail of another, since which time the scout hain't been seen."

"I have heard of this Buffalo Bill; but will you please tell me who he is?" asked Lucille Fallon with an interest that caused Jack Jessop to at once comply with her request.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL DEAD-SHOT.

"YER asks me ter tell yer who Buffalo Bill is, miss?" said Jack Jessop, gazing with admiration upon the young girl on the box by his side.

And well worthy was she of admiration, for her form was faultless, and she was clad in a neat gray traveling dress and soft slouch hat with a black plume in it.

Her face was one of striking beauty, the features distinctly cast, full of expression and bearing the imprint of a bold, fearless nature full of determination, intelligence and character strangely marked in one so young.

She had come prepared for a long stay, to judge from her baggage, which completely filled the rear boot of the coach, and she carried a small repeating rifle and revolver, with which she had amused herself shooting at game along the way, and always proving herself a dead-shot to the admiration of the drivers she had been a pleasant companion for.

"Yes, I would like to know all you can tell me about Buffalo Bill, for I have often heard and read of him," said Lucille.

"Well, miss, he is ther king of 'em all as a scout, guide an' Injun-fighter."

"He begun away back in Kansas, when a boy o' ten, and no man has seen ther wild frontier life he have, and to-day he stands at ther head o' ther list as a man o' narve and skill in border craft."

"He kin outride a Injun, shoot ter dead center with rifle, revolver or bow an' arrer, kin handle a knife like a sword, and though he hain't no man-hunter, lookin' up men ter kill, he have a record that few kin equal for takin' care o' his life when he is jumped on by them as wants him out o' ther way."

"Ef if comes ter private graveyards I guess Buffalo Bill c'u'd show up with any of 'em, and ther Injuns he has called in ther chips of, would make a long list, though he only hunts a red-skin in war, never jist ter scotch him."

"He is a very remarkable man, from your description, sir."

"You bet he be, miss! Remarkable is ther word. He's a six-footer and a inch ter spare, straight as a soldier on parade, handsome as a woman, a gent clean through, while he is a pard to tie to when a man needs aid."

"At present he is chief o' scouts at Fort Advance, or he were two weeks ago, but since that time he hain't been heerd of, and I do fear he has been kilt, for the Red Hands put a warnin' up that they would kill him, and maybe they has."

"I sincerely hope not."

"So does I, miss; but if they has, then they will be hunted down sart'in by Buffalo Bill's scouts."

"Men do say that he bears a charmed life, and it looks so; but it may be, after all, that he has had to go under."

"We pass the warning post this arternoon, miss, and though it were put up as a monument to my driver pard, Six-Horse Sam, they changed it to a death-warning to Buffalo Bill, as you will see when we gits there, miss."

Lucille Fallon had been deeply interested in all that Jack Jessop had told her of Buffalo Bill, the Red Hand Riders and frontier life.

Whatever her life in the past had been, she felt that she was now almost going into another world, that she was about to cross the threshold of a new existence and one that held for her a wonderful charm.

Suddenly a deer sprung up before them in the trail, and, quick as a flash, the rifle of the young girl was at her shoulder, there was a rapid aim, a sharp report and the game dropped dead.

"A splendid shot that, miss, and one even Buffalo Bill or your father couldn't beat."

"You are as quick as a flash and are a sure shot."

"I doubtless inherit any talent I may have as a shot from my father," was the quiet reply, and drawing in rein, Jack Jessop dismounted from the box and quickly dressed the deer, throwing it upon the top of the coach with the remark:

"You took him just back of the head, miss."

"That is where I aimed for."

But Jack was dubious, and he kept his eye watching for more game.

He wished to see if the shot had been a chance one.

At length he saw a coyote skulking along the trail.

"Can you drop him, miss?"

Again the rifle was quickly aimed and the coyote rolled over dead.

"You is a dandy, miss!" and Jack drove on with increased admiration for his fair passenger, the "Girl Dead-Shot" as he called her.

It was after noon when the coach, half an hour ahead of time, began to ascend Monument Hill.

The trail moved over the summit of the hill, and then down again into the valley and on its way to Fort Advance.

"I can catch up more time in the valley, miss, so I'll get you in while the sun is yet an hour high, so you can see what your father looks like by daylight, as you say you hasn't seen him for a long time."

"No, I do not even remember him, for I was but two years old when he went away," she answered with some sadness of tone, and the silence that followed was broken by Jack's hastily uttered words:

"Lordy, is we to be held up this soon? for there's somebody at the Monument waitin' for us."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WARNING ON THE WAY.

THE remark of Jack Jessop caused Lucille to glance quickly ahead, up to the summit of the hill.

Her eyes first fell upon the white cross placed there as a monument to the dead, and it gleamed brightly in the rays of sunlight.

Then she saw, relieved against the background of trees, a horse, bridled and saddled, but his rider was not visible.

Having discovered the animal, Jack Jessop at once took the idea of a hold-up by road-agents.

To turn and dash back down the trail

would accomplish nothing, for mounted men would readily overtake the coach in that rugged road.

To go on might mean to certain death, and yet there was nothing else to be done.

So Jack then called out to those in the coach:

"Thar is somebody ahead in the trail, and it may mean road-agents, so be ready for what may turn up."

The voices of those within showed that the news was startling to them, and faces at once peered out of the coach windows upon either side.

To Lucille Jack said:

"I hopes you hain't got much money and valuables with you, miss, in case we should be held up."

"Yes, I have a good deal of money, some jewelry of value and the contents of my trunks are valuable also."

"It would be hard indeed to have to lose what I have with me, though what can't be cured must be endured, you know, and I will accept the situation as best I can."

"You is plucky, miss, jist like the sergeant," and Jack peered anxiously ahead as the coach-horses toiled on up the steep trail.

As they neared the monument the driver suddenly gave a whoop that startled his fair passenger, while he said eagerly:

"It's all right, miss, for that is Buffalo Bill's horse, Lucifer; I knows him now."

As though to add proof to the driver's words the tall form of the scout came out of the timber, mounted, and rode toward the coach, meeting it just as Jack drew rein in front of the cross.

"Hoopla! Pard Bill, I is glad to see you and no mistake, for I thought you was dead, and then seeing your horse we mistook you for a road-agent."

"No, Jack, I am very much alive, as you see, and I am just off of a trail after road-agents, and wish to warn you to be on the alert on the run in to the fort, for I have reason to know that a band of Red Hands are abroad."

"I'll watch for 'em, Pard Bill, but with you along, I won't fear 'em much."

"I am going in the other direction, Jack, but will come on to the fort to-morrow."

"I'll report seeing you, Bill, but, let me interdooce yer to a young lady who knows yer by name, Miss Lucille Fallon, ther sergeant's daughter, and going to the fort to stay with him."

The scout bowed low in his courteous way, taking off the broad sombrero that he wore, and Lucille gazed with admiration upon him, feeling that Jack Jessop's description had not been overdrawn.

"Ho, Cody, glad to see you again," said a voice from the coach, and the officer held out his hand which the scout grasped with the words:

"Ah, Lieutenant Leslie, I am glad to see you again, sir."

"I am going to the fort under orders, Cody, and hope we will get through without being held up by the Red Hands, of whom I have heard so much."

"You say you have reason to believe there is danger ahead on the trail?" said the young officer.

"I know that a band of Red Hands, sir, are out on a raid, and feared they might strike the coach, on the trail, but hope not sincerely."

"So do I, for besides the lady on the box, there are two other passengers in the coach and they are, they tell me, well supplied with funds, as they are going to the mines in search of paying leads."

"The Red Hands would strike it rich if they held up this coach, and particularly for the young lady's sake I hope they may not."

"Thank you, sir, for your consideration, but do not mind me, as I am ready to take what comes with the rest," was Lucille's plucky response.

"You are plucky, Miss Fallon, and I hope that Jack will get you through without trouble. I know your father, the sergeant, though I was not aware that he had a daughter."

"Keep your eyes open, Jack, now I have warned you, and I'll tell you frankly that I am going back on the trail, fearing a raid on

Nip's station after horses, for the band headed in that direction, but I came by here hoping to meet you."

"And what do you think of that warning, Mr. Cody?" asked Lucille, pointing to the cross.

"I saw it some time ago, Miss Fallon, and had reason to know that they intended to keep their threat, for two of them ambushed me here; but there lies one of them in that newly made grave, while I have been upon the trail of his comrade."

"Did you get him, Bill?"

"No, Jack, I did not; but some day I may have better luck," was the quiet response of the scout, and raising his hat in adieu, the coach rolled on once more while he continued on along the trail it had just come over.

"Wal, miss, what does yer think o' him?" asked Jack Jessop as they went on their way once more.

"Buffalo Bill you mean?"

"Yes, miss."

"I think he is a very wonderful man, certainly a very magnificent specimen of manhood, and one I would trust implicitly from his face."

"So that is the man who has such a history, who is the bravest of the brave, and has made such a name for himself by his daring deeds?"

"That's the man, miss."

"Well, such a man ought to rise above his fellows, be marked among men in actions as he is in appearance, or else magnificent physique and manly beauty go for naught," said Lucille, speaking rather to herself than to Jack Jessop.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISSING COACH.

THE time was drawing near for Jack Jessop's coach to roll into Fort Advance, and all were on the *qui vive* to greet it.

Never before had its arrival been looked forward to with such interest, and it was all on account of the sergeant's daughter.

Even the officers showed decided interest in the coming of Lucille Fallon, for recognizing that the sergeant was a gentleman, a man of refinement, and that some cloud or misfortune had made him enter the ranks as a private soldier, they felt assured that his daughter must be a lady.

That she was a reputed heiress of course had much to do with their desire to see her was certain, and the stories told of her fortune had been repeated until it was said that in some way the fact had leaked out that Lucille Fallon was worth half a million.

The sergeant had made a cozy little home for his daughter.

The cabin was prettily located, had a piazza across the front and four rooms in it, and the sergeant was known to have money and spared no expense in fitting it up.

Mrs. Carr and several other ladies at the fort had insisted, in a friendly way, of sending over several presents to add to Miss Fallon's comfort and pleasure, and Sergeant Fallon had accepted them for the kindly spirit in which they had been sent, and more, he had been aided in fitting up things in a tasty way by one or two young ladies who were glad to lend their services for that purpose.

The soldier's wife was on hand, and an excellent cook, she was preparing a tempting dinner for the sergeant and his daughter to sit down to on their first night in their new home.

The men not on duty hung about to catch a glimpse of the young lady upon her arrival, several of the young sergeants, who expected to meet her socially, had spruced up to make an impression upon their comrade's daughter, and the officers and wives from the colonel down to the junior lieutenant were curious to see the fair stranger.

As the sun neared the western horizon, however, a storm rose suddenly over the mountain-tops, and the thunder crashed in deafening peals against the cliffs, while the lightning flashed incessantly.

It was grand to look upon yet appalling, and when the rain descended in torrents it drove all whom duty did not force to face it, into the nearest shelter.

Sergeant Fallon paced to and fro upon the little piazza of his cabin, his brow clouded, his manner anxious, and he gazed again and

again up at the inky clouds to note a break in them.

So black were the clouds that darkness fell upon the scene before the setting of the sun, and the greatest anxiety began to be felt for the coming coach.

The mountain torrents would be swollen beyond their banks, and the way was a most dangerous one even under the best of circumstances, and now it would be far worse.

As the time drew near for the arrival of the coach, and the sentinel on the lookout tower, who could see several miles along the trail, did not report its coming, Sergeant Fallon could stand it no longer, and throwing on his great storm-coat went to ask permission to go out and meet the stage.

It was granted on condition that he would take a squad of cavalry with him.

He asked for half a dozen volunteers, and he could have gotten as many hundred.

But half a dozen was all he would take out to face that storm, and armed with lanterns, in case of need, and protected from the elements, the party rode away in the gloom, which, as night came on grew more and more intense.

The sergeant and his men were seen to fade away in the darkness and then, as the time came and passed for the coach to come in, great anxiety began to be felt.

An hour passed and still the storm roared and thundered, still the rain came down in driving sheets of water.

But no coach came in.

Two hours passed and it was decided that the coach must have broken down.

In her anxiety the colonel's wife urged that another party be sent out, taking an ambulance with them for the protection of the young girl, and other passengers, if there were any.

A harum-scarum young officer asked to command the party, and it was granted, for he was as brave as he was wild—in fact, his rapid, reckless life had gained for him the name of "Wild Walter," his name being Walter Worth, and his rank that of first lieutenant.

With a liberal income besides his pay, having been first a midshipman in the navy, graduating with the honors of his class, and after a cruise in foreign lands resigning and becoming a Texan rancher, then getting an appointment in the army, a dashing officer, living rapidly and as generous as he was brave, Walter Worth had, young as he was, run the gamut of a very adventurous and remarkable career, and to go out in search of the missing coach was just what chimed in with his humor.

CHAPTER IX.

A FATAL BRIDGE.

SERGEANT FALLON had pressed forward in the darkness and storm, unmindful of its fury.

He cared not for himself in his anxiety for his daughter, for well he knew the danger of that fatal trail on such a night.

Jack Jessop he had perfect confidence in, and yet in that mad warfare of the elements he knew that huge rocks were split from the mountain-tops and hurled down into valleys and canyons through which the stage trail ran.

He knew that there were log bridges here and there, one or two spanning canyons that went down sheer hundreds of feet, that little brooks would become foaming torrents, and larger streams would swell into rivers in such a fall of waters.

He hoped that Jack Jessop, realizing the danger of going on, when he saw the storm rising, had sought some spot where he knew he would be secure, and had halted for the night, for better a long delay than an accident.

"I told Jack to take good care of my little girl, and he will do it," said Sergeant Fallon to the men with him, as they rode on through the storm, leaving it to the instinct of their horses to stick to the trail in the darkness.

On, on they pushed until they came to a halt at a torrent.

A lantern was taken from beneath its shelter of rubber blanket, and its rays showed that the little creek had surged beyond its banks and the bridge of logs was gone.

"Men, I will not ask you to follow, so seek shelter and camp; but I will pass on," said the sergeant.

But, the men at once followed him into the foaming waters, and their horses carried them safely across to the other side.

Another stream was crossed in the same way, for there was no back-out to the brave volunteers who had joined the sergeant in his search for the missing coach.

At last they reached a point near where they judged the coach must have been when the storm broke upon it.

But, they had not seen any trace of it, and the sergeant had kept the lantern in view, so that it would be seen by those in the coach if they were near.

Large bowlders had been found here and there in the trail, here a tremendous tree had been uprooted and half fallen across the way, while smaller ones were scattered about in confusion, having blown from cliff-tops down into the canyon and valley.

"When we reach River Canyon we will be likely to find the coach on the other side, for there is a good halting-place there among the pines," Sergeant Fallon called back hopefully to his men.

River Canyon was so called as it was a rapid, surging stream, dashing between cliff-banks hundreds of feet in height and not thirty yards apart.

Across this chasm, from cliff to cliff, a span had been thrown by an army engineer of four strong, long trees, and upon these heavy split logs had been laid and lashed firmly with wires.

A railing was upon either side, and yet it was a perilous looking structure to cross, and several fatal accidents had occurred there, a mule team and driver going over at one time, an emigrant wagon and several children at another, and several times, a cavalryman's horse had plunged down with him, so that the bridge was greatly dreaded.

"Jack would not dare venture to cross in the storm, so we will find them in the pines," the sergeant said as they neared the canyon.

In the intense darkness nothing ahead could be seen, and the roar of the surging torrent down in the canyon was deafening.

The thunder still crashed viciously, and now and then at long intervals the lightning flashed forth in blinding flames revealing momentarily all the weird, wild scene about them.

At length all the horses came to a halt, and taking the rubber covering off of the lantern he carried, the sergeant turned it upon the trail ahead.

One look and the cry broke from his lips:

"Great God! See! the bridge is gone!"

The soldiers all saw that the bridge was indeed gone, that there was no wooden span across the canyon.

There were the posts deeply sunk to which the ends of the four spanning timbers had been made fast by wires, but these showed that the bridge in falling had nearly uprooted the stags.

"This accounts for the delay of the coach."

"Yes, Jack is in shelter on the other side, and we can go no further and it is a ride of many miles around, so I will not see my child to-night."

"See! the cliff caved here, and it must have fallen from the other side, which also caved in—my God! what if the bridge went down with the coach upon it?" and Sergeant Fallon reeled from faintness at the thought, when suddenly, from across the chasm, came a loud hail:

"Ho! who is there?"

"Buffalo Bill's voice! my life on it," cried the sergeant excitedly.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUT'S TRAIL.

WHEN Buffalo Bill left Nip to return to the relay station, he started off alone upon the trail left by the two horses of the two outlaws who had ambushed him.

He felt assured that though the man whom Lucifer had attacked was able to ride he must at least be considerably hurt, for the horse had held a good grip on his shoulder with his teeth, and if he had not struck him some severe blows with his hoofs it was miraculous.

He might have really been unconscious

when he left him, and reviving have hastened, suffering though he was, to make his escape.

Robbing his dead comrade of his weapons, and taking his horse in lead, he had doubtless at once hastened to his camp for aid.

Buffalo Bill felt that the man had been cunning enough to throw him off his guard, if he was really not unconscious when he had left him.

He felt that he could follow the trail of the two horses readily, and he pushed on at a brisk pace in spite of the long ride that Lucifer had already had.

The trail led further into the mountains, and toward the Indian country, a circumstance the scout did not particularly care for as he knew it would give him both outlaws and red-skins to contend against.

But nothing daunted he pushed rapidly on, determined to face every danger in tracking the outlaw to the lair of his band, and he did not draw rein until darkness shut out the trail from view.

Then he sought a camp for the night, and finding good grass for his horse, and water near, soon made himself comfortable.

Nip had dressed the wound in his head for him, so that gave him no trouble, and having eaten his supper in darkness, for he dared not light a fire, he had at once wrapped himself in his blankets and sunk to sleep.

The next morning, the moment it was light enough for him to see to follow the trail, he was again in the saddle and pushing further and further into the land of danger.

He did not halt until afternoon, for the fresh appearance of the trail told him that the man he pursued was not far ahead of him, and he hoped to overtake him before he should reach his retreat.

He had come upon his night camp, then where he halted for breakfast, and also upon other halting places which convinced him that the outlaw was really badly hurt and compelled by his sufferings to take frequent rests.

It was in the middle of the afternoon that the scout was congratulating himself that his enemy could not be but a short distance ahead, when suddenly Lucifer's foot turned on a stone in the trail, which ran around the edge of a rocky hill, and down he went crushing the scout under him, for so sudden was the fall, and unexpected in his surefooted horse, that Buffalo Bill had no time to save himself.

The fall was such a hard one, the head of the scout striking the rocky ground, that he was stunned, and twice the animal in struggling to rise fell heavily back upon him.

Insensible, Buffalo Bill lay like one dead, while the frightened horse stood near gazing at his prostrate rider with deepest pity in his almost human eyes.

A moment the scout lay thus, and then there came bounding down the hill a slender form.

It was a woman, and she was clad in buckskin, leggings, skirt and jacket, and wore upon her head a slouch hat.

A rifle was slung at her back and in her belt was a revolver and a bowie-knife.

Her face was darkly bronzed yet beautiful, and she looked scarcely twenty years of age.

"He had a bad fall, and I fear is badly hurt."

"What shall I do?" and she dropped on her knees by the side of the scout.

Feeling his heart she found that it was beating, and then running to the stream at the base of the hill she filled his large hat with water and taking it back held it between her knees and began to bathe his face.

It was not long before the eyes opened, and the scout beholding the woman bending over him, gazed at her in a dazed way and muttered:

"My horse went down with me, and—am I dead, and are you an angel in buckskin?"

"You are not dead and I am far from being an angel."

"You are neither in heaven or Hades, but you had a bad fall and are severely hurt," was the reply.

"I believe you are right, for I feel as though my head was splitting open and every bone in my body was broken."

"It is not half so bad as that, for I do not believe you have any broken bones; but you need help and care, and I will aid you to your saddle and you can return to your friends."

"Who are you?"

"It matters not who, or what I am."

"Come, let me aid you to your feet."

The scout arose with the greatest effort, and suffered severely in doing so.

The woman saw that he could hardly stand and said:

"Where are your friends?"

"I am alone."

"No one is with you?"

"None nearer than Fort Advance."

"Then you will surely die if I do not care for you, for you cannot ride half a dozen miles."

"I half believe you are right."

"See here! I will take you to my home, but upon one condition."

"Well?"

"That you pledge me your word of honor you will not betray me, or ever speak of what you discover there."

"I will give the pledge, for really I am half blind and suffering greatly."

"Then I will trust you, Buffalo Bill."

"You know me?"

"Yes, and for that reason am anxious to serve you."

"Now I am your friend, but break your word and you make me your most merciless foe; but you have pledged me your word?"

"I have."

"Then I will save your life."

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

LUCIFER seemed relieved at the coming of the woman upon the scene, and gladly came at her call.

So helpless was the scout from his fall, that the woman found it no easy task to help him into his saddle.

But, she did so at last, and, taking the rein, led the horse slowly down the hill.

After going half a mile she halted and said:

"I fain would trust you, Buffalo Bill, but I am determined to be on the safe side."

"I believe you will keep your pledge, yet I must take no risks, and you must submit to being blindfolded."

"As you please," was the reply, and the woman led the horse alongside of a rock, got upon it, and with a silk scarf she had knotted, about her waist blindfolded securely the scout's eyes remarking:

"I will trust you not to remove this with your hands, because they are free."

"I will not do so."

Then she leaped up behind the scout, Lucifer seeming not to mind at all his extra load, and rode on up the valley.

She turned into the stream after going some little distance, and the scout noticed that the horse was seemingly guided in a number of directions, but whether purposely to throw him off his guard, or to follow the regular trail he did not know.

After going several miles, it seemed to Buffalo Bill, the horse was halted and the blindfold was removed from his eyes.

At first he could hardly see, but soon his eyes took in his surroundings and he discovered that he was in front of a log cabin, built against a cliff.

Everywhere about him were lofty, overhanging cliffs, covered with heavy timber, and in front of the cabin ran a stream.

"Here is my home, Buffalo Bill, and in distress as you are, you are welcome, but it would, not be so, if you were yourself, for your life is in danger here, as it is."

"Come! I will do what I can for you until you are able to go your way, and then my advice will be, when I take you back to the trail on which I found you, that you make all haste for Fort Advance, for death lurks in every covert in this country for you."

She aided the scout to dismount and helped him to a bed of robes and blankets she spread for him in one room of the cabin.

Then to the surprise of Buffalo Bill, a negress appeared and asked with the familiarity one of the southern negroes always shows to a master or mistress:

"Now, chile, who has you got dere, for I doesn't know him?"

"No, Aunt Polly, you do not know him, for he is one I found on the trail badly hurt and brought him here, so we must care for him."

"Where is Uncle Toby?"

"Gone fishin', missy—no, dere he comes now," and as the negress spoke, a form appeared in the door of the cabin carrying in his hand a string of fine fish.

"Here, Uncle Toby, I wish you to look after this gentleman, and care for him well, for he has been badly hurt by his horse falling upon him."

"You claim to be a doctor, so see to it that you cure him in the shortest time possible, for you know that he must be away from here before the next visit of—"

She paused suddenly and seemed confused an instant and then added:

"Yes, he wishes to be able to return to his post as soon as possible."

"Yas, Missy Mildred, I'll fix him up all right in no time," said Uncle Toby, seeming very proud of the opportunity to show what he could do.

Turning the fish over to Polly, he at once set to work, removing the scout's jacket, and looking to his injuries.

"There hain't no bones broke, sah, but you had a awful bad fall and is bruised up all over; but I has some linament here dat will do you heaps o' good," and he gave the bruised body of the scout a thorough rubbing with a mixture that he said would soon take the soreness away.

Buffalo Bill certainly did feel easier after the rubbing, and was able to eat some supper which the negress brought to him later on.

Then he went to sleep and so the night passed away.

He was terribly stiff and sore the next morning and could hardly move, but the negro, Toby, took the best care of him and after a few days he began to improve.

His meals were brought to him by the negress, and they were well cooked and tempting, for he had quail, fish, squirrel, bacon nicely broiled, hoe-cakes and good coffee.

The strange and beautiful woman who had brought him there he saw no more of, and questioning the two negroes about her, gleaned no information from them.

They were loquacious enough on all subjects save about their mistress and what she was doing in that wild land.

On this subject they had nothing to say and not a word did they utter that gave him any clue toward solving the mystery of the mysterious woman who dwelt with them alone in that far-away land.

CHAPTER XII.

UNFATHOMED.

It was the tenth day after his coming to the cabin when the scout said that he must delay no longer, but take his departure.

He had said several days before that he was able to ride, but both of the negroes insisted that he should not do so until he was really well once more.

Their mistress he had not seen since the day of his arrival, and asking about her gained only the reply:

"She's about, sah, and she hopes you is better."

When he decided that he would remain no longer, Buffalo Bill took some money from his pocket and liberally rewarded the two negroes who had so tenderly and kindly cared for him.

To his surprise they no longer urged against his going, as they had each time before when he spoke of doing so, and they helped him dress and prepare for his long ride.

As he stepped outside of the cabin there sat the mysterious woman who, for ten days he had not seen.

"Ah! you are not invisible after all, a myth as I almost feared?" he said with a smile.

"No, I am very decidedly flesh and blood, no myth, no angel in buckskin, as now you see."

"I hope you have recovered entirely, sir?"

"I have, for I only feel stiff and a trifle sore now, thanks to the good care I have received."

"How can I ever repay you for your kindness?"

"If the time ever comes when I have to

ask you to repay me I will do so frankly, but I hope that day may never come," and she spoke earnestly.

"I trust it may come, for I feel most grateful to you, as, had you not cared for me I really believe I would have died there, being unable to help myself."

"You were in a bad way; but you have said that you hope the day may come when you can serve me, and I beg that you will remember those words, should it so happen that you might have the opportunity to help me."

"I will not forget them."

"Shake hands on that."

The scout did so, and then the woman said:

"You will not forget the pledge you gave, not to betray my presence here?"

"I will keep it."

"Not to hunt me down, nor seek to solve the mystery of my life, my stay here in these wilds?"

"I renew my pledge."

"Thank you—you will keep it."

"Now I will have to blindfold you again, and then guide you back to the trail you were on when I met you."

"There has been rain since you came, so whatever trail you were following then has been obliterated now, so you will go back to the fort."

"Yes, I can do nothing else."

"I have had Polly put up provisions for you, and your horse has been well cared for."

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

She again took her scarf and securely blindfolded the eyes of the scout, and then the negro led up Lucifer, all saddled and bridled, along with a horse for his mistress.

The scout mounted with a slight effort, the woman leaped lightly into her saddle, and led the way down the canyon, the two negroes calling out "good luck" to the one who had remembered them so generously.

Again it seemed several miles to the scout, by the trail that the woman led him, before she halted.

But at last she did so, and removing the bandage from his eyes she said:

"You recall this spot?"

"Yes, it is where I had my fall, and Lucifer seems ashamed of himself for the trouble he caused."

"I will not again remind you of your pledge, but I will warn you not to again come this way—good by."

She held out her hand, the scout grasped it, and she wheeled her horse and dashed away.

The scout gazed after her for a moment and then rode on his trail, muttering to himself:

"She is an unfathomable mystery, for I am pledged not to attempt to fathom it."

"Well, she saved my life, that is certain, for I fear I could never have helped myself, crushed and buried as I was, and I will never forget her for it, or those two dear old negroes."

"What does her stay in this wilderness mean, I wonder, and, who is she?"

"Bah! I'll craze myself guessing at what I cannot fathom."

"Now for the fort, for I suppose I am looked upon as having turned up my toes."

After a fair day's ride, for Lucifer was fresh, the scout camped early, and the next morning arose feeling like himself again.

During the day he came upon a fresh trail going toward the settlements.

It was made by over a dozen horses, and he at once followed it until it branched off toward the relay station nearest Monument Hill.

Here he left it and went to the hill to meet the coach, for he remembered that it was the day for its run to the fort.

Having met Jack Jessop and warned him, Buffalo Bill again followed the trail he had discovered until he saw that it crossed the stage trail, and went southward, and he turned off to Nip's station, which he had feared would be attacked, for he felt sure that the Red Hands were on a raid.

Leaving the station to go on to the fort he was caught in the terrible storm and took shelter in the pine thicket where Sergeant Fallon had hoped he would find Jack Jessop's coach.

CHAPTER X.

IN DIRE SUSPENSE.

THE clear, ringing voice of the one who hailed from the other side of the canyon reached the ear of the soldiers distinctly above the roar of the waters and the fury of the storm still raged.

The sergeant recognized the voice at once as that of Buffalo Bill, and so called back in the tones of one who seemed more to command:

"Ho, Scout Cody, is that you?"

"Ay ay, sir! Are you from the fort?" came the answer.

"Yes, I am Sergeant Fallon and half a dozen soldiers come out to find Jack Jessop's coach."

"The coach should have reached the fort well ahead of time, for I saw it at Monument Hill."

"And it left the Hill?" almost gasped the sergeant.

"I do not hear you, sergeant."

"Did the coach leave the Hill?"

"Yes, all right!"

"And should have crossed here before the storm broke?"

"Yes, or about the time."

"You have come along the trail?"

"Yes, I rode to Nip's relay station and back this far."

"I saw signs that led me to believe the Red Hands would strike the trail somewhere and I returned," was the answer of the scout.

"And you saw nothing of the coach?"

"No, and it is strange that you have not met it."

"One question more, Buffalo Bill!" cried the sergeant, in a tone full of intense anxiety.

"Yes, sergeant."

"Was my daughter in the coach?"

"Yes, she was on the box with Jack Jessop, and there were also along Lieutenant Ernest Leslie and two other passengers."

"Might Jessop not have driven into the pines for shelter?"

"No, for I reached here about dark, and took shelter in the pines when I saw that the storm was not going to blow over."

"I saw your lights and came down to see what they meant and found the bridge gone."

"God have mercy! My child is lost," cried the sergeant in a voice so full of anguish that it went to the hearts of the soldiers who stood by his side.

"Ho, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir!" answered one of the men, for the sergeant could not speak.

"Off to the right is a small canyon, in which there is an old camp and a wicky up, so you had better retreat there for shelter until morning and I will return to the pines, for with the daylight we can find the coach if Jessop has run in for shelter somewhere."

"All right, Mr. Cody; I will do as you suggest, for it is cruel to keep the men out, and do you seek shelter, too," said the sergeant, rallying from his great distress to reply.

Then he led the way into the little canyon where the wicky up was found and afforded a good shelter from the wind and rain in that secluded spot.

The horses, too, were sheltered, a fire was built and the men turned in; but the poor sergeant in his sorrow paced to and fro unmindful of the storm and longing for day to break and end his terrible suspense.

Buffalo Bill also returned to shelter, for in the pines was another old camp and a small log cabin which afforded a dry retreat for his horse and himself.

With his rubber coat and blankets he had kept dry, so that the scout was far from being uncomfortable as he had built a fire in the stone fire-place of the little hut, and hoping that the morrow would reveal that the coach was safe he was soon fast asleep.

How long he had slept the scout did not know, but he was awakened by a loud knock at the door and a voice called out:

"Ho, within there!"

The scout was upon his feet in an instant. He knew that the Red Hands were somewhere about, as he had followed their trail in the afternoon.

Though they had crossed the stage trail going southward they might have returned, and he did not know who else it could be at

the door of his hut but the outlaw band, for there would hardly be any one else abroad on such a night, and the bridge being gone no one from the fort could cross.

So Buffalo Bill felt the danger of at once opening the door, as he might be confronted by a whole band of Red Hands; therefore he asked quietly, as he got his repeating rifle ready for work.

"Well, who are you and what do you want?"

CHAPTER XIV.

WILD WALTER'S DARING.

SERGEANT Walter Worth, or "Wild Walter" as his men liked to call him when speaking of him, started out to follow on the trail of Sergeant Fallon, with the firm hope that he would come up with him by the time he met the stage-coach and be able to render aid to the fair passenger through taking her to the fort in the ambulance.

He led the way himself along the trail, the ambulance, with its lanterns casting fantastic shadows ahead, following, and the cavalrymen bringing up the rear, all glad that they were able to lend some aid to the sergeant's daughter.

Under many an officer the little relief party would not have gone far on such a night; but Lieutenant Worth was not one to falter where duty called, no matter what obstacles barred his way.

The bridge being gone from the first stream they came to caused only a temporary halt, and the young officer caused two of his men to make their lariats fast to the mules and the ambulance, plunge in after him and follow across.

It was a close call but the stream was crossed, and on they went.

Obstacle after obstacle was thus gone by and at last the party arrived on the brink of Canyon River, and then they came to a halt, for beyond that there was no passing.

The men gazed at the abyss, listened to the roar of the rushing river far beneath, shrunk from the fury of the storm and looked toward their young commander as though expecting an immediate order to retrace their way to the fort.

But the order did not come, only the words:

"Drive the ambulance nearer so that the lights will shine on the brink here."

The order was obeyed and the two large side lamps on the ambulance shone brightly upon the spot where the bridge had been.

But, they revealed what the flickering lantern, half shaded by the rubber to prevent its being blown out, had not done, and this was that one of the cross pieces had remained spanning the chasm.

It was the upper one of the four timbers, and at the smaller end resting on the brink where the lieutenant and his men stood, was a foot in diameter, and longer by two feet at the base on the other side.

The four pieces had been reversed alternately in laying the bridge to make it of equal strength.

The timber had been wrenched loose from its fastenings, when the bridge had gone down, but yet it had remained spanning the chasm where all else had fallen, and in the uncertain light of the sergeant's lantern had not been seen, while in the darkness on his side Buffalo Bill had failed to observe it.

The quick eye of the young officer had at once seen the spanning timber, and he had called for one of the ambulance lanterns, and approaching the brink had sprung upon the log and glanced down coolly into the seething river hundreds of feet below, while his men hardly dared look at him so dizzy did it make them to see what he ventured.

"The bridge has gone, that is certain, but this timber remains and appears to be firm, though I cannot see how the other end rests," he said.

Then he added, as he threw the light as far out over the chasm as it would penetrate:

"See here, men, I shall go across and take the lantern with me, for if the coach is sheltered yonder in the pines on the other side I wish to know it, though what has become of the sergeant and his party I should like to know."

"Oh, lieutenant, do not do it," cried the corporal.

"Do what?"

"Go to your certain death, sir, on that log."

"Why, there is no danger in it?"

"No danger, sir, and it not a foot wide on this end?"

"I could walk it if it was half as wide," was the confident reply.

"Yes, sir, but it's hundreds of feet to the river below; and just listen to the roar of the waters, sir; and all in darkness below, sir, and if you slipped you'd go to the devil, sure, sir."

Walter Worth laughed at the last remark of one of the men and said in his pleasant way:

"You seem pretty sure of my future, Casey; but you all forget that I have been a sailor and often in a storm like this at sea have I been aloft in the rigging."

"Why this is easy walking as you will see, and I am so anxious about the sergeant's daughter I am determined to risk crossing and go on to the pines."

"Please don't do it, sir, for you will go to your death I am sure."

"If I do, corporal, my junior lieutenant steps into my shoes, so what will be my loss will be his gain."

"Poor consolation for you, sir."

"I shall go across, and you can wait here until you see my lantern disappear in the pines, and if I do not find the coach there I shall press on up the trail until I find it, for Heaven grant it went not down with the bridge."

A fervent answer came to the prayer from the lips of the men, and the corporal asked:

"If you should—not return, sir?"

"If I should go down, why return to the fort and report my loss, and the colonel and my friends will say I was a fool."

"But when you see my light enter the pines, go to the canyon on our right and seek shelter in the old camp there, for this is indeed an awful night to be out for men and horses, and I believe the storm is increasing."

"It is, indeed, sir, and the wind will blow you off the log, sir."

"I think not, for I've walked the yard-arm in as bad a blow, and on a pitching ship."

"Here goes," and the lieutenant sprung upon the timber.

CHAPTER XV.

DARING DEATH.

WITH his sword caught up on the belt-hook, and the ambulance lantern in hand, the daring young officer threw the light out upon the timber span and boldly stepped forward, while the men shrunk back with bated breath and gazed in appalled admiration at his nerve.

He hesitated a moment as he peered ahead of him, but seemed undaunted by the narrow path he had to tread, and the knowledge that a false step, or loss of nerve for an instant would dash him to death.

The wind swept savagely down between the hills, the rain drove into his face with stinging force, the waters roared threateningly far beneath him, and the thunder rolled incessantly, breaking now and then into a terrific peal that followed a vivid, blinding glare of lightning.

But the undaunted officer never swerved from his purpose, and while his men breathlessly watched for his destruction to follow his death-daring act, a few of them even turning their faces away, he boldly stepped forward on his perilous journey.

He walked slowly but surely, each foot being put down upon the wet timber with caution, to feel that it would not slip.

He swayed at times under the impulse of some sudden gust of wind more furious than the others, but held on his way as before.

The men watched the glare of the lamp going further and further away, and then hardly dared breathe as they saw him come to a halt in the very center of the timber.

He made a motion as though he was testing the strength of the timber span ahead, and apparently satisfied moved on once more.

A form had come up to the crowd who were watching him, and unseen by them stood gazing in terror at the bold officer.

It was Sergeant Fallon.

He had left his men asleep and returned to the chasm alone.

He saw the flickering glare of the lantern, discovered to his horror that it was going out over the canyon, and dared not speak as he silently came up and joined the group of soldiers.

Spellbound he watched, for he saw now that one of the bridge timbers remained, and with the others he beheld the bold advance of the daring young officer toward the other cliff.

Nearer and nearer he drew, and at last with a leap he was upon the brink, and as he wheeled about with the lantern facing them now the soldiers broke forth in one wild, exultant yell that arose above the roar of the storm.

In that cheer of admiration the sergeant joined, and the men saw for the first time his presence in their midst, and one of them called out:

"Lieutenant, Sergeant Fallon is here, sir!"

"Ah, Fallon, are you there?" called back the officer, his voice calm as ever.

"Yes, sir, my men are camped in the canyon."

"Were you following us, sir?"

"Yes, to lend what aid I can; but finding the bridge gone, I crossed to look for the coach on this side."

"I will join you, sir."

"On your life, no! The timber rests only on the bare end on this side, the cliff having washed, and now it would not bear your weight."

"Go into camp and I will press on and see what I can discover."

The sergeant made reply that he would find Buffalo Bill in the pines, but this Lieutenant Worth did not hear, and walked rapidly on his way.

"You go to the camp, men, for I will remain here."

"I cannot sleep, and it is best for me to wait here," said the sergeant, and the men obeyed, leaving him alone.

He stood watching the retreating light for a while, and then determined to see if the lieutenant had tried to frighten him from venturing upon the span of timber.

He had a cool head and would dare anything; but a few feet on the timber showed him that it was very shaky and that it would be madness to attempt to cross, so he concluded to wait there until the night passed away.

In the meanwhile Lieutenant Worth had reached the pines and disappeared within their shelter.

He followed the narrow way cut into the thicket until he came to the open space where the hut stood.

To his delight and surprise he saw the glimmer of light through the cracks, for he was sure that the coach had taken refuge in the pines.

Going up to the hut, and not seeing any trace of the coach or the horses, he wondered who could be within.

But whoever it was he was determined to know, and so knocked loudly upon the door and asked who was there.

The voice of the scout in reply he at once recognized, and called out:

"Ho, Cody, it is you is it?"

"Yes, and you are—"

"Lieutenant Worth."

Instantly the door was thrown open and the scout was face to face with the young officer.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

"WELL, Cody, I am indeed glad to find you, for we had become so anxious about you at the fort that the colonel had told me I might go on a scout after you if you did not get in in another day."

"Thank you, lieutenant, but I am all right now, though I have been laid up, as my horse rolled over me and I was very badly used up."

"Yes, you look pulled down; but where have you been?"

"On a scout, sir, to see if I could find any trace of the Red Hands."

"Ah! you have heard that they have death-knelled you, I suppose?"

"I read their warning, sir, cut into the cross on monument Hill."

"Well, you bear a charmed life and I have little fear of your being killed somehow."

"But I am on a special trail."

"Yes, sir."

"Sergeant Fallon, the splendid fellow, had word of his daughter's coming to the fort by to day's stage and he set out to look her up, and I followed him, for the coach had not come in."

"Yes, sir, I saw him on the other side of Canyon River some hours ago; but, how did you get across?"

"I remember now that he came up as I crossed and he said something that I did not hear and it was your name."

"I came here to look up the coach."

"But how did you cross, Lieutenant Worth?" again asked Cody.

"One timber of the bridge remains and I crossed on that."

"Well, sir, you have more nerve than belongs to one man, for I know of no one else who could do it."

"You know I was a sailor, Bill, and what looks venturesome to a land-lubber is pie for a seaman."

Buffalo Bill shook his head and replied:

"It was as daring an act, sir, as I ever knew done, to cross on that piece of timber a night like this."

"But the coach is not here, sir."

"No, and not on the other side."

"So the sergeant said, sir, unless it is in shelter somewhere and was not seen."

"Do you know that it is not in shelter on this side, Cody?"

"I hope that it may be, sir, though I doubt it, for, except in these pines there is no shelter back for a couple of miles, and I came over the trail before night, and would have observed the tracks had the coach turned off."

"Very true."

"Then, too, I saw the coach at Monument Hill a dozen miles from here and it was ahead of the schedule time that Jack Jessop runs by, and should have reached River Canyon before the storm struck it."

"Yes, and if safe it is on the other side in shelter somewhere?"

"Yes, sir."

"If not, it went down into the chasm with the bridge."

"I hate to think of it, sir."

"So do I, and it will well-nigh kill the sergeant."

"I did not know that he had a daughter, sir."

"Nor did any one else; but it seems that he had, and his wife dying lately his daughter wrote that she was coming on to join him here, and she has been left a fortune I hear too, and is a refined, educated young lady."

"She is that, sir, for I saw her, and a perfect beauty as well; but for the fact that she is a sergeant's daughter she would be the belle of the fort, sir."

"You saw her at the Hill?"

"I did, sir."

"What was she like?"

"She had great large dark eyes, golden-red hair, the longest lashes, teeth even and as white as milk, and a smile that was most fascinating."

"Great Scott, Bill, but she made an impression on you—my God! what if she has been lost?"

"It will be fearful, sir, and the sergeant will never have the satisfaction of ever finding her body."

"No, the river is bad enough at all times, but with such a rainfall as we have had, not a vestige of the coach can ever be found, for it will be dashed to pieces at once."

"I pray Heaven such a fate may not have befallen them."

After some further conversation, the young officer decided to remain in the hut until dawn, getting what rest he could.

So he shared the scout's blankets with him, and with the fire burning brightly sought to sink to sleep.

But neither could coax slumber to their eyes, as before them rose continually the dread fear that the coach had gone down into the seething river, and all had been dashed to death, while the beautiful girl the scout had pictured being thus fated to die, seemed most terrible to them.

"I cannot sleep, Bill, for each time I close my eyes I can see the coach going down and imagine I hear that young girl's cry of despair."

"I feel the same way, sir. For Jack, Lieutenant Leslie and the others I also feel, but for that beautiful girl to meet such a fate seems far worse than for a score of men to die."

"You are right; but it is almost dawn, so let us go to the chasm and wait."

They put on their storm-coats and leaving Lucifer still in the cabin, set out for the river in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

GIVEN UP.

THE glare of the lantern coming out of the pines caught the eyes of the sergeant, as he paced to and fro upon the brink of the chasm.

It was a ray of hope, for the lieutenant had said that he would go on up the trail, and now he was coming back.

Perhaps, after all, Buffalo Bill had been mistaken and the coach had taken refuge in the pines, he thought.

He saw the lantern coming like a will-o-the-wisp toward him.

The storm had broken, the clouds had blown away, the thunder had ceased to reverberate through the mountain passes, and only a glimmer of lightning afar off now and then was visible.

The wind had dropped down to a gentle zephyr and the eastern skies were brightening under the coming of day.

But the rivulets still ran wildly from the vast quantities of rain that had fallen, the river roared even more furiously deep down in its narrow walls, and the sergeant almost felt that the groans of the doomed passengers of the coach the cry of his daughter, mingled with the sound of the waters.

Nearer and nearer came the light, and at last as the officer and the scout reached the brink of the chasm the sergeant called out:

"Oh, tell me that you have found the coach!"

"Ah, sergeant, that is you, is it?"

"Yes, sir, and you have news for me?"

"None yet, my poor friend, but we hope with the daylight to find the coach on your side in hiding somewhere."

"God grant it, sir."

"And, sergeant, for fear you might have passed it in the darkness, send one of your men back in all haste over the trail, and to report to Colonel Carr the loss of this bridge and the condition of the trails."

"Yes, sir."

"And, sergeant, also report that Buffalo Bill is here with me."

"I will, sir," and the sergeant started off at a swift pace for the little camp in the canyon.

The men there had also been restless with suspense, and were just turning out as he arrived.

He at once ordered two of them to mount and wrote a short report of the situation to Colonel Carr, also stating that only one timber of the River Canyon bridge remained and on that Lieutenant Worth had daringly crossed to the other side through the darkness and storm, to continue his search for the coach along the trail.

One of the two men received the report and they both started off at a gallop, while the rest of the party began to prepare breakfast.

Returning to the chasm the sergeant found that the lieutenant had again crossed on the timber, while Buffalo Bill had gone back to the hut to stake his horse out to feed, and would return to breakfast with the soldiers, and to learn if any news of the coach had been learned.

In a short while the scout reappeared, and as day had dawned now, it showed how the brink of the cliff on each side had washed, and that the one span of timber held on the further end only by a foot or two.

But the scout had a nerve of iron also, and boldly walked across the timber, remarking as he joined the others:

"It is daytime now; I would not have done it last night, lieutenant, for a colonel's commission."

Walter Worth laughed lightly, and the three walked over to the camp to breakfast.

The meal was eaten hastily and in silence, and then Buffalo Bill said that he would ride back to Monument Hill and examine every foot of the trail to see if the coach had turned off anywhere, and he would then return to the bridge and report, but hoped to find good news awaiting him of the missing coach.

So back across the piece of timber went the scout, and returning to the chasm the young officer and soldiers watched his departure and then started back over the trail they had come from the fort, also hoping to find the coach, or meet one of the couriers with tidings that it had been found.

But mile after mile was gone over; then they saw a party of horsemen coming toward them.

They proved to be the chief engineer-officer at the fort and his assistants, coming to at once set to work in respanning the river with a bridge, for the courier had arrived at the fort with the sergeant's letter.

Finding that the coach had not gone on to the fort, Lieutenant Worth and the sergeant returned with the engineer-officer to the river, and the men coming up were at once set to work cutting other trees with which to build a bridge.

The lieutenant and the sergeant crossed the span together, for now their only hope lay in Buffalo Bill.

Should he return and report that the coach had not been seen, had not taken shelter anywhere along the trail, all hope would die away.

At last the scout came in sight, at a swift gallop, and as he drew near he called out:

"The coach is not on this side."

"Nor on this," answered Lieutenant Worth, while the sergeant said in a voice of anguish:

"Then all hope is gone—it went down with the bridge!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S SUSPICION.

THE strong man who had been full of nerve in direct danger, who had smiled at the whiz of a bullet close to his ear, had suffered hunger, hardships and ills that made others quail without a word of complaint, and always had a cheery word to add courage to his companions, now trembled as though he had been seized with a chill, when the belief forced itself upon him that his daughter had met a terrible fate just as she was almost within reach of his arms.

"She was so young, had so much to live for, and now death has claimed her."

"Oh! why was I not taken and she spared?" said the sergeant to Lieutenant Worth who answered in a tone of deepest sympathy.

"It was her fate to go thus, Fallon, yours to live on, and you are spared for some good purpose, so do not despair man."

"Lieutenant, I will not despair. I will live, for there is yet much in life for me, be it good or bad. Shall I return with my squad to the fort, sir?"

The man's manner instantly changed, and though his face was white he was calm and every inch the soldier now.

"God bless the brave fellow!" said Buffalo Bill who saw his act and heard his words, and, seized by some strange impulse, the scout added:

"See here, sergeant, I cannot believe your daughter is dead."

"Not dead, sir?"

"Well, you may all set me down as a fool, but I cannot believe that Jack Jessop would drive on that bridge unless he was sure that it was safe; and more—it does not look to me as though that beautiful young girl was doomed to meet death in such a terrible manner as appears to be the case."

"No, I shall not give up hope that she is alive until I see the very end of this trail," and Buffalo Bill walked away, while the engineer-officer shook his head and said:

"Cody is generally right, but he is wrong this time."

"I cannot but think so, too," added Lieutenant Worth, while the sergeant said in a low tone of deep earnestness:

"And his words have given me hope, for I cannot believe that I will never meet my child."

He then saluted and walked away calling to his men to return with him to the fort.

The wagons coming up went into camp near the chasm, the sappers and miners at once getting out their tools to go to work on the bridge.

Buffalo Bill finding that a sentinel would be placed across the canyon, decided rather than ride around to a far-away crossing, he would leave his horse to be cared for by the soldiers while he went to camp with the lieutenant, riding a soldier's horse, who went back in the ambulance.

As they rode along together Lieutenant Worth said:

"I say, Bill, what reason have you to believe that the sergeant's daughter is not dead?"

For a moment Buffalo Bill made no reply, and then he answered:

"I am sorry I made that remark, lieutenant, though not on your account, but that others might not repeat that I think she is not dead."

"Only the sergeant and Captain Payne heard you, Bill."

"May I send a note back to Captain Payne, sir, by one of your men?"

"Certainly."

"I wish to ask him not to speak of the remark, for reasons I will make known later."

"All right."

The note was written and dispatched by a cavalryman back to Captain Payne, who had at once set to work on his plans for a new bridge.

"Now, sir, I will ride on and overtake the sergeant, so as to ask him not to speak of my remark."

"All right, I'll go with you; but you have some motive in wishing your words to remain unknown, Cody?"

"I have, sir, and as we have been on a number of scouts together, and you have always been most friendly to me, while I may need your aid, I will tell you just what was in my mind when I said what I did."

"All right, Bill, I am with you in any work."

"The truth is, lieutenant, it looks too hard that a lovely young girl such as is the sergeant's daughter should meet so terrible a fate."

"I agree with you."

"And there is Lieutenant Ernest Leslie, a handsome, dashing rich young officer who should not be thus cut off in life."

"Yes."

"There were two gentlemen in the coach going out to invest in mining property, and they looked like clever fellows, while Jack Jessop you know, and what a splendid pard he is."

"None better."

"Then, too, Jack takes no chances like driving on that bridge, and the sergeant had asked him to take good care of his daughter."

"He should have been at the bridge before the storm struck him, and only the rain would have made the structure unsafe; so, all things considered I look to other reasons for the disappearance of that coach than going down with the bridge."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHADOW OF A CLUE.

THE earnest manner of Buffalo Bill deeply impressed Lieutenant Worth.

Wild as he was, reckless, free and easy and indifferent, he had a big heart and was as brainy as any man at the fort.

He knew Buffalo Bill well, and was aware that when he had a suspicion on any subject he was sure to have a foundation.

The argument advanced that Lucille Fallon was too beautiful to meet such an awful fate, that the same doom should not also fall upon the others, Walter Worth took as a mythical reason for a decided opinion the scout had of the real cause of the disappearance of the coach and its passengers.

"Bill, you have some clue to urge you to say what you do, more than a belief that the girl is too beautiful to meet such a doom."

"I will tell you in confidence, lieutenant, that I have only the shadow of a clue that the coach did not go down with the bridge."

"Fire away, Bill, and let me see how I regard this shadow of a clue."

"Well, sir, you know the band of Red Hands?"

"But too well."

"I have been away hoping to track them to their retreat."

"A proven impossibility thus far."

"So it seems, sir; but I had a fall from my horse, or rather he fell, crushing me beneath him, and I was so badly hurt I had to lie up for nearly two weeks."

"When able to travel I started upon my return to the fort to refit, and start out again."

"Are you able? for you look pulled down, Bill."

"I'm all right, sir; but on my way I came upon a trail of a score of horsemen, and it led toward Nip's stage station, and leaving it I went to Monument Hill to meet the coach, as I told you."

"I saw Jack, there, the sergeant's daughter, Lieutenant Leslie and the others."

"Jack was ahead of time, as I have said, and was pushing, he told me, to get to the fort some time before night, so that his fair passenger should have a welcome by daylight."

"Just like him."

"He could make better time after leaving Monument Hill, than before getting there, for the valley trail was easy to travel, and if he gained half an hour in the mountains he would double that time in the lowlands."

"Naturally."

"Calculating his time even at no increased speed, he would have reached Canyon River bridge an hour before the storm broke, and should have arrived at the fort when the sun was an hour high: in fact before the tempest swept down from the mountains."

"It would seem so, certainly."

"If his coach had broken down I would have seen it, so it did not, and as the storm had not washed away the cliff, the bridge was perfectly safe: in fact would have borne up half a dozen coaches."

"Well, Bill?"

"Now Jack would never have driven onto that bridge had there been a suspicion that it was unsafe, and until its foundation was washed by the rain it was safe, and so I say he either crossed it, or did not cross it."

"I don't exactly understand, Bill."

"I do not believe the bridge went down with the coach on it."

"You do not?"

"No, sir."

"What do you believe, then?"

"I may be wrong, sir, but those outlaws I was trailing crossed the stage trail going south, near Nip's station, and that may have been a blind, for they may have turned and come back to the stage trail, striking it near River Canyon bridge, or crossing it, have laid in wait beyond."

"Ah! now I see your trail, Bill."

"If they did, and held up the coach, they got a big lot of money from the sergeant's daughter, Lieutenant Leslie, and the two speculators, and must have known of their coming and who they were."

Lieutenant Worth gave a loud whistle of surprise.

"They, knowing who they were, after robbing them, could hold them for ransom, thus securing a larger sum, or—"

"Or what, Bill?"

"Or they could, to cover up their robbery, have put them out of the way."

"And the coach?"

"Could have been driven on the bridge, which could have been cut down, and thus hide their crime, causing the very belief, with the storm arising, that all now hold, that the waters undermined the timbers and the coach and all went down with the bridge."

"Buffalo Bill, you are a wonder; but have you nothing more than a suspicion that such is the case?"

"No more than that the other bank of the chasm was not undermined enough to have thrown the bridge into the river, save by aid of human hands."

"Bill, you lead me to believe as you do, for now I remember that the timbers projected beyond where the cliff was washed, as is the case with the one we crossed over on."

"But there is the sergeant ahead, will you tell him your belief?"

"No, sir," was the almost stern response of the scout.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FAINTEST HOPE.

IN an altered tone after his decided reply to Lieutenant Walter Worth, Buffalo Bill said:

"Let me explain, lieutenant, that I do not wish to excite hope in the heart of poor Sergeant Fallon which may be dashed to the ground."

"I spoke without thinking when we were back at the river, and now I wish to tell him to forget my words, and that I only hold hope as long as we find no proof of the loss of the coach by going down with the bridge, by the bodies or mark of the coach."

"I shall tell him I shall search for more proof, by looking up any wreckage of the coach and for the bodies, going a long way down the river to do so, and shall ask him not to speak of what I said, or hint to a belief that I held any suspicion that the coach had not gone down with the bridge."

"What comfort he may get out of this faint hope I will be glad of."

They soon overtook the sergeant, riding ahead of his men, his face pale and stern.

He saluted the lieutenant with his usual courtesy, and was dropping to his place in the rear, when the officer said:

"See here, Fallon, Buffalo Bill is going to make a scout down the river to see if any traces can be found of the bridge, coach, and—yes, the bodies."

"He does not wish to build up false hopes in your heart that your daughter is yet alive."

"No, sergeant, I can only say that my hope is so strong that I wish proofs that the coach and all in it are lost, yet please do not say to any one that I believe the coach did not go down with the bridge."

The sergeant heard the words of the lieutenant with respectful silence, and when Buffalo Bill added what he did, he cast a quick glance at him and his pale face flushed, while he said:

"Your very words give me hope, Mr. Cody, for unless there was a doubt in your mind you would not assume the almost useless task of looking for the bodies and wreckage."

"I am a soldier and on duty, so will continue on in my routine, but not until I see you give up hope will I do so, and I leave all in your hands and will tell you now that I no more believe my daughter is dead than do you and Lieutenant Worth, who, if she is not, will soon discover the truth."

"Please believe that I trust all to you," and he saluted the officer and held out his hand to Cody.

The lieutenant grasped the outstretched hand himself, and said warmly:

"All my sympathy is yours, Mr. Fallon, and the truth, good or bad, we must some day know, and may it be in the near future."

"Trust all to Cody, our good friend here."

"I will, sir, I do," was the low response, and the lieutenant and scout rode on, leaving the sergeant to follow more leisurely with his men.

Reaching the fort they readily saw that a gloom rested on all there, and as they rode in, the officer of the day called out quickly:

"Any news, Worth?"

"The worst—the bridge is gone, and there can be but one belief, that the coach and all in it went down with the wreck, for no trace of it can be found."

"Poor Sergeant Fallon; but I heard that Lieutenant Ernest Leslie was in the coach and others too?"

"Yes."

"A bright fellow gone, and poor Jack Jessop too."

"Sergeant, go and lower the flag to half mast," and the officer turned to the sergeant of the guard, who hastened to obey, the flag fluttering down to half-mast just as Sergeant Fallon rode into the fort.

He was received with a dead silence that was more expressive than words of sympathy, and the officer of the day returned his salute by raising his hat, a mark of respect the sergeant saw and appreciated.

Going to his quarters the sergeant at once went to report to Colonel Carr, who received him with a sympathy that was genuine, yet could express no hope that there might yet be good news, for if Buffalo Bill had given

up the search for the coach the commandant wanted no further proof that it had gone down with the bridge.

"Retain the quarters you had selected, sergeant, as you may wish to be alone more, and you can have a leave if you wish," said the colonel.

"I would prefer to remain on duty, sir, to employ my mind; but I will keep the quarters, sir, as you say I may do so."

"Certainly," and, as the sergeant left, the colonel said to his wife:

"I can see that the poor fellow still clings to the hope that he may yet hear from his child, that she may not be dead."

"Ah! there comes Lieutenant Worth and Buffalo Bill and we will now hear the whole story for I had not the heart to question Fallon," and as the colonel spoke the lieutenant and Buffalo Bill entered his quarters.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN IMPLIED RESOLVE.

"WELL, Cody, I began to fear we would have to send out a search expedition after you, as you have been absent two weeks, and I have been told of the Death-Knell written against you on the cross on Monument Hill," said Colonel Carr as the scout entered his quarters with Lieutenant Walter Worth.

"I have been laid up, sir, from a heavy fall, while looking for the retreat of the Red Hands who have warned me of my doom," and then Buffalo Bill went on to report the ambush against him of the two men at Monument Hill, and how he had followed the trail of one of them who had been fatally hurt as he had believed.

But of the woman who had so mysteriously come to his aid he said nothing more than to ask:

"Colonel, did you ever hear of any settlers having gone up into the mountain country to the north of this?"

"No, Cody, I never did, and yet, now I recall it, I remember that there was a mining train of a dozen people who started up there in search of gold and were never again heard of, and what became of them was never known."

"Search was made for them, but whether they pushed on through and found homes elsewhere, or were massacred by the Indians we could never discover, but it was thought that they met the latter fate."

"How long ago was this, sir?"

"Half a dozen years at least; but why do you ask?"

"I found traces, sir, of there having been white people in that country."

"Ah! then those of whom I speak were doubtless the ones, and they were doubtless all massacred."

"They were warned against going there, but would take no heed of what was said to them."

"What did you find there?"

"A cabin, sir," answered Cody.

"Doubtless built by those of whom I speak."

"Well, they form but a small part of the number of those who have boldly penetrated this western wilderness of danger and death never to be heard of again; but those Red Hands in ambush gave you close call, Cody," and the colonel gazed at the wound on the scout's forehead where the outlaw's bullet had cut its way.

"Yes, sir, but the wound was slight."

"You never seem to mind hard knocks, Cody; but now about the sergeant's daughter?"

"Everything indicates, sir, the going down of the coach with the bridge over Canyon River."

"Yes, there can be no doubt of that, and the sergeant is broken-hearted, poor fellow, for, as I understand it, he has not seen his child since she was a mere baby, and he was separated from the wife, who lately died; at least that is my idea, though he has nothing to say on the subject."

"It is a very sad case, sir."

"Sad, indeed, and we have to mourn the loss of that bright young officer, Ernest Leslie, who was coming here as my *aide-de-camp*, as also poor Jack Jessop, the Overland driver and two others."

"I wish to send one of your men at once to the settlement, Cody, to report to the

stage-agent there, so he can send another coach through to leave here on the day scheduled."

"Yes, sir, I would like to go on this duty myself, colonel, and—"

"Beware, Cody, how you go alone about the country, for those red hounds mean to keep their threat against you."

"I am very sure of that, sir, if they get the chance; but I must not, on account of that warning, fail to attend to my duty of scouting."

"Very true, only do not go alone."

"I can do better alone, sir, in finding out what I would know, and then call on my men when I need aid."

"I will have that warning-post removed at once."

"No, Colonel Carr, I beg that you will allow it to remain, for I may have some more carving to do upon it, as I have already cut there one name, that of Hawk, which the man whom I shot answered to, and there are others to keep him company."

This threat of Buffalo Bill was quietly uttered, but it implied much to the colonel and Lieutenant Worth, for it told them that if the Red Hand Riders had warned him, and were upon his trail, he had resolved also to hunt them down.

"As you please, Cody, only go slow and be careful."

"I will, sir; but I would like to ask you now if, after I have informed the stage-agent about sending the coach here to start out next Thursday, if I can then have my own time for a few days to thoroughly patrol the Overland trail and its vicinity?"

"Yes, but surely not alone?"

"Yes, sir, though I would like to have several of my men in hiding at certain points, in secret camps, where I can easily reach one of them if need be, and also ask if Lieutenant Worth and a squad of his men can be in readiness to leave at any moment they get a call from me."

"You are playing some game, Cody; but as you are 'most always a winner, I cannot but say it shall be as you say, if Lieutenant Worth desires such a detail of duty."

"Nothing would please me more, sir."

"Very well, you are relieved from other duties for the present, and can pick your men, a sergeant, corporal and sixteen cavalrymen, with packs all ready to start at a moment's notice on a call from Scout Cody," said the colonel.

"Lieutenant Worth bowed in acquiescence, saluted and left the colonel's quarters at once, while Buffalo Bill said:

"Understand me please, colonel: I have nothing definite in view, only desire to go off on a scout for an unlimited time to see what I can accomplish in pursuing the trails of the Red Hands, and ask your aid in case I may need the lieutenant and his men at a moment's notice."

"You shall have your way, Cody; but tomorrow morning will be time enough for you to start, and I will have the letter to the stage-agent ready for you."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SCOUTS.

THE sun was an hour high when Buffalo Bill reached Canyon River, the morning after his interview with Colonel Carr.

He had gone to his quarters and prepared faithfully for his secret expedition of indefinite time, taken along an extra belt of arms and another repeating rifle, with a full camp outfit and provisions to last several weeks.

It was his wish to take a pack-animal, one of his best horses, but to be used as such.

That night, before leaving, he had gone to Lieutenant Worth's quarters and held a long interview with that young officer, at which the two had come to a thorough understanding of the movements in the future, and had confidentially talked over the scout's plans, for the latter had every confidence in Walter Worth.

To the scout's quarters the same night had gone Sergeant Fallon.

The latter was attending to his duties as usual, but his haggard face showed how he suffered, and he had the sympathy of every one at the fort.

"You are going to the settlement, Cody?" the sergeant had said on entering the scout's quarters.

"Yes, I leave at dawn, sergeant. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I would like you to mail a letter for me—register it please, for it would be a week nearly before it would leave here, you know."

"It will give me pleasure to do so, sergeant."

"It is to my daughter's attorney, telling him of what has happened, and yet in the very face of all, I have dared say that she may yet be shown not to have thus lost her life, for your words gave me that hope, and I will not banish them from my heart until I see that you give up hope."

Buffalo Bill made no reply.

He saw that the sergeant, like a drowning man, had grasped at a straw of hopes, his words uttered the night before on the Canyon River.

He could not bid him hope, with the slender thread he had to cling to himself, and yet he would not wish him to utterly despair.

"You are silent, Cody, yet I know, I see, I read in your heart that you do not believe that my daughter is dead, that you do not believe that Jack Jessop and his coach went down with the bridge."

"Every evidence points to its having done so, Sergeant Fallon, and yet I am one who is most hopeful, hard to make give up, and so I am determined to have proof of the fact that the coach went down with the Canyon River bridge."

"Proof?"

"Yes, for three large timbers of the bridge went down, and several smaller cross pieces, and then there was the coach, six horses, the harness, five people, baggage and tarpaulin on top, and I tell you that I must find some of these things."

"The river was a torrent that night."

"It is the better for my purpose, for I know its course."

"There are places where it broke through, and when it runs down, the debris would be found on its banks where they are shelving, miles below here."

"You are right."

"I shall follow down one side and up the other, until I am sure that there is no trace of coach, team, baggage or passengers, and then I shall try another plan."

"But you will need help," urged the sergeant.

"No, I will need no help, for I prefer to go alone, to attract no attention in what I do."

"I will take with me four of my scouts, who will be placed within call, and when I need further aid, it will be quickly furnished."

"Now I have told you what I intend to do, but you must not breathe it to a soul, for I am supposed to have gone off on business for the Overland Stage Company alone."

"Buffalo Bill, your words give me hope, and I will not despair that they mean more than you care to have me know."

"We have always been friends, but find my child for me, and you are my brother—no, no, not that—not that, but dearer by far, and I will devote my life to you—good-by, and Heaven bless you."

With a wring of the hand that made even Buffalo Bill wince under the iron grip, Sergeant Fallon turned and left the scout's quarters.

The next morning when Buffalo Bill left the fort it was just at break of day, and he was accompanied by five of his scouts, one of whom led a pack-horse.

The scouts horses were all heavily loaded, save the one ridden by Buffalo Bill, as though they were going on a long scout and carrying ample provisions and camping outfit.

Arriving at Canyon River they found that Captain Payne had the bridge well under way, and after a short delay the scout's horses were taken across, though not without the greatest risk.

But the one ridden by Buffalo Bill was not taken over, nor did two of the scouts cross, one of them starting back to the fort with his chief's horse, and had any one taken notice of the fact it would have been seen that on the way to the bridge one of the five scouts had mysteriously dropped out.

And it was one of the four who had come

prepared for a stay, according to the traps he carried with him on his horse.

It was the fifth man, who had carried no extra weight, that went back from the bridge, leading the horse the chief of scouts had ridden there.

Crossing over Buffalo Bill had found Lucifer in fine trim, and mounting him had started on up the trail toward the settlement, accompanied by his three remaining men, and leading his pack-horse.

In the old camp in the pines another of the scouts dropped out, and the chief and the others passed on until Monument Hill was reached, when the scout left the other two along with his pack-horse, going on along the stage trail alone.

All this meant some settled plan, some mysterious move to be carried out by Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SCOUTING ALONG THE STAGE TRAIL.

HAVING gotten rid of the scouts who had accompanied him from the fort, Buffalo Bill went on his way to the second stage relay station, over which Nip presided as stock-tender, the first one out from Fort Advance being only a dozen miles distant from the fort.

Nip was seated in front of the cabin and seeing the scout coming, arose to meet him with the remark:

"Seen any more of the Red Hands, Pard Bill?"

"No, have you?"

"We hasn't; but Tuck is off scouting now to prevent a surprise from them and a running off of our stock, for if we got 'em in the corral here, we could stand off the gang from our cabin."

"They will hardly fight you for your stock, Nip. In fact, I do not now believe they would care to run it off, for they wish the stages to run, so that they can hold them up for gold and booty; but you have heard no news of Jack's last run have you?"

"None; was he held up?"

Just then Tuck, Nip's pard, came up, and reported that he had seen no trace of the road-agents anywhere around in a circuit of miles, and the only trails he found made since the storm were of game, deer, bear and coyotes.

Nip and Tuck, as the two men were known, were fine specimens of bordermen. Both had records as fighters and were chosen on that account for the lonely and perilous life of stock-tenders on the stage trail.

They would defend the company's stage property with their lives, and were square, all-round fellows.

As Tuck came up he saluted Buffalo Bill with a shout of welcome, told of his scout around the station for miles, and then the two heard from the scout the story he had to tell of Jack Jessop's mysterious disappearance with the coach and its passengers.

"Went down with the bridge, Pard Bill, and no mistake," decided Nip.

"If ther coach can't be found nowhar, thar is nothin' else ter believe. Poor Jack," said Tuck.

"And that beauteous young ledly—she were too pretty ter die," added Nip.

After finding that the two stockmen, with no hint from him, took no other view of the loss of the coach than through its going down with the bridge into Canyon River, Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and rode on, stating that he would send another coach through to the fort to start out on time from there.

"This is gittin' to be a fatal trail ter drive, Pard Bill, and yer won't find drivers itchin' ter take ther run," said Nip as Buffalo Bill rode away.

The next relay station, like the one nearest the fort, had but one stock-tender, as it was near the settlement.

This man met the scout as he rode up and listened with deep interest to the story of the loss of the coach and passengers.

"Yer of course lays it to the bridge, Pard Cody?" he said after awhile.

"Why of course, for what else could have been the cause, Mooney?"

"That's so; it's sad for poor Jack."

"It is indeed; but I thought, Mooney, that you and Jack were foes?"

"Whatever I has ag'in' a man living, Bill, I forgives him when he's dead."

"That is a good creed, Mooney; but I must go on to the settlement, for I wish to reach there by night," and Cody rode on his way once more, musing to himself:

"Somehow I cannot believe Mooney is square. I always doubt him, and I shall keep my eye on him, for somebody posts the Red Hands when to strike a blow, and it is somebody who knows more than an outsider can know.

"The man at the settlement who was a spy I discovered in the one who attacked me at Monument Hill, and whom, now, I wish I had allowed Lucifer to kill.

"Of course he is not such a fool as to return there after my having discovered who he was; but I did not remove his mask and maybe he thought I did not recognize him after all.

"He is a bold fellow and plays a clever hand at all times."

It was just growing dark when Buffalo Bill rode into what was known as Pioneer City.

It was an important stage center, though an insignificant place, consisting of half a hundred houses, a stage tavern known as "The Overland," a coach and blacksmith shop, stables for the horses of the company, a couple of stores and a dozen saloons.

A few poorly paying mines were scattered about near by in the mountains, there were several cattle-ranches within a couple of hours' ride, and half a dozen small farms, and such was Pioneer City and its surroundings.

Perhaps five hundred people were in and around the place, and to them Pioneer City was a very important center, for it was on the main line of the Overland with several branches running from it, one of which was a weekly coach to Fort Advance and back.

The Overland was a cabin structure two stories high, and with sleeping rooms above, the office, dining-room, kitchen and saloon being on the first floor, and if any one could sleep in peace there at night he had a good conscience and better nerves than most men.

When Buffalo Bill rode up he was welcomed by "Colonel" Buck, an ex-sheriff, judge, soldier, Vigilante and man of all professions and trades.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUFFALO BILL SPOTS HIS MAN.

"COLONEL" BUCK was a character of Pioneer City. He had been a private in the war, but claimed the honorary title of colonel, and having been a police justice also, took the title of "judge."

He had been also a deputy sheriff, was a member of a band of Vigilantes and at last became landlord of the Overland Tavern, stage agent and all-round man about the town, or rather camps, for the place was little else.

The colonel was a brave man, and had shown it on many occasions.

He loved money, and put aside something each week for a "rainy day," until he was known as the richest man in Pioneer City.

He had a bluff, but hearty way with him, and when Buffalo Bill rode up greeted him in a manner that showed that the scout was a favorite with him.

"Well, Cody, the sight of you is like salve for sore eyes. I'm downright glad to see you, and hope you are to tarry with us a few days."

"No, colonel, I am off again to-morrow, but I come this time as a courier for I bear a letter to you from Colonel Carr."

"Ah, indeed, from my good friend Colonel Carr, who I hope is well?" said Buck; and though his words implied a friendship between the real and the bogus colonels, he had never met the commandant of Fort Advance but once in his life.

"Read the letter, colonel, for it is important, and what it does not explain I will," said the scout.

The letter was short and to the point.

It stated merely that the coach of Jack Jessop, on its way to Fort Advance on the last run, had been caught in the storm and gone down with the bridge across Canyon River, all being lost.

As it was necessary to keep the mails going on regular time, he, Buck, would see to it that another driver and coach were sent out to be ready to leave Fort Advance as scheduled.

Any other information desired would be furnished by Cody the chief of scouts, who would go over the trail with the driver, should he be a new man.

Colonel Buck was astounded at the news, and at once turned to Buffalo Bill to give him the full particulars.

This the scout did; and, as the Overland Agent, Buck went at once out to the yards to select a driver and coach to be sent the next day to Fort Advance.

He seemed almost stunned by the shock of the news of the death of Jack Jessop, the sergeant's daughter and the others who were with the coach.

Having had supper with the colonel, after it was arranged that Toby Hart, a crack driver and a plucky one, would take out the coach, Buffalo Bill said:

"See here, colonel, what kind of a man is Bat Brindley?"

"First class."

"Is he not postmaster at Pioneer City?"

"Well, yes and no, for he is a man of education, you know, and helps old man Hawley with the mail; in fact, does most of the work when he is not off prospecting, for he is constantly going gold hunting, you know."

"With what success?"

"Sometimes he strikes it, for he has money, I know."

"Where is he now?"

"In town."

"Has he been away lately?"

"Well, not for over a week, as he got a fall and was hurt quite bad, he said, so come back for the doctor to fix him up."

"Where does he live?"

"Over on the hill, but he'll be in the saloon to-night, if you wish to see him, for half the town are there every night."

"I would like to see him; but, do not speak of it if you meet him, or of my being here."

"No, I won't; but is anything wrong between you, Bill?"

"Wait and see, colonel, and if I want help, I'll call on you, for I'm on the right trail in what I do."

"As an officer of the law, Bill, I've got to back you, though I hope you are wrong, for Bat Brindley is one of our best citizens, free with his money and a good fellow all round."

"All right, if I make a mistake, I am responsible for it."

"Now let us go into the saloon."

The two walked into the large saloon and gambling den run in connection with the tavern, and the colonel's first words were:

"There is Bat Brindley now."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE "OWL" IDENTIFIED.

THE man pointed out as Bat Brindley sat at a table with three other men playing cards, and the pile of money in front of him showed who was the winner.

He glanced up as the landlord and Buffalo Bill entered, but went on playing, making no comment on the murmur that ran around the crowded saloon at the entrance of the scout and the welcome he received from a score of voices.

After a short conversation with a group of men who gathered about him, for the news had already spread through Pioneer City of the loss of Jack Jessop's coach, Buffalo Bill walked over toward the table where Bat Brindley sat and nodded to him as he looked up with the remark:

"Glad to see you, Buffalo Bill; but, it's hard news you bring."

"What do you mean?"

"About Jack Jessop and his coach."

"How about the other news I bring?"

"What is that?"

"Have you heard the rumor about the capture of the whole band of Red Hands?"

A general exclamation of astonishment was heard on all sides, while Bat Brindley dropped his cards in utter amazement, while he asked excitedly.

"Is this so, Buffalo Bill?"

"I only asked you if you had heard a rumor to that effect, for I had not; but, it seemed to startle you, when it only surprised and pleased others."

"I do not understand you, Buffalo Bill."

"I will be so explicit that there will be no mistaking my words, Bat Brindley."

"I accuse you of being one of the Red Hands!"

A general exclamation followed these words of the scout, and every eye was turned upon Brindley, whose face now was perfectly calm, as he replied:

"Is this your little joke, Bill, or are you drunk?"

"It is my serious joke, and I am not drunk, Brindley; so I repeat my charge and can prove it!"

"What is the proof you offer against all who know me here and that your charge is false?"

"I charge that your right shoulder is all bruised and bears the marks of horse's teeth upon it, while there also are bruises from the hoofs of my horse upon your breast."

"It is a lie to thus accuse me, though I am all bruised up from a fall I had, as my friends here know."

"I have made the charge, Brindley, that you are one of the Red Hand band, and—Ha! that is your game, is it?"

Buffalo Bill had seen the man he accused drop his hand upon his revolver, and so quick was he in drawing his, that his weapon flashed before Brindley could level his.

A sharp cry of pain followed the scout's shot and the revolver dropped from Brindley's shattered, bleeding hand, while Buffalo Bill cried sternly:

"Hands up, Bat Brindley, or I will kill you, and I do not wish to do that."

A suppressed silence had fallen upon all in the saloon.

All eyes were upon the scout now, as he covered Brindley with his revolver, forcing him to raise his hands above his head, while he cried earnestly:

"Don't kill me, Cody!"

"Had I wanted to do so, I would not have shattered your hand to disarm you."

"No, I wish to save you for the rope, Bat Brindley."

"But say, Cody, is there not some mistake?" cried Colonel Buck, coming forward.

"No! there is no mistake. That man is a Red Hand, and two weeks ago ambushed me at Monument Hill."

"There were two of them, and they gave me this wound."

"It stunned me, and as they came to bag their game, my horse seized Bat Brindley by the shoulder and, as I believed, hurt him so severely by his bites and hoofs that the outlaw was wholly unconscious when I called the horse off."

"I shot the other man dead, and believing Bat, here, to be mortally hurt, I rode on to the first station for help to bring Brindley in."

"When I returned he was gone, having robbed his comrade and taken his horse along, also."

"They were both masked, but I looked at their faces and one of them was this man."

"Look at his shoulder and you will find where my horse bit him, and struck him on the body with his hoofs—Ah! doctor, I want you to see to this man whom I was compelled to shoot in the hand," and Buffalo Bill turned to the doctor of Pioneer City, who had been hastily sent for by Colonel Buck.

All had heard Buffalo Bill's story of his being ambushed, and the charge that Bat Brindley was a Red Hand.

It was hard for some to believe, but there were others who knew that the scout was not one to make a false charge against any man.

"Strip him, and of the bites and hoof-blows is there, hang him!" cried a voice.

"No, gentlemen! This man is my prisoner, and goes to the fort for Colonel Carr to decide upon his fate."

"If I make any mistake I hold myself answerable."

"Hang him!" now came a chorus of voices about the room, and, wheeling quickly, Buffalo Bill faced them, a revolver in each hand, for he saw that an ugly humor had been aroused against Brindley which only prompt action would quell.

CHAPTER XXVI.

INJUN NICK SHOWS FIGHT.

"MEN, this man shall not be given over to the merciless fury of a mob.

"I am the one most wronged, and I shall see that he has a fair trial and is given a chance to prove his innocence, so do not make any scene here, for I shall protect him with my life."

Buffalo Bill spoke with perfect calmness, and in a distinct tone that all heard, and he had stepped between his prisoner and those who were now threatening him, while the doctor—Pills they called him in Pioneer City—was skillfully dressing his wounded hand, for, constantly expecting practice in surgery the doctor always went prepared with his case of instruments, lint and all else necessary.

The scout's words had their effect, but this was heightened by a voice suddenly calling out in the favor of Bat Brindley:

"See here, Buffalo Bill, has you any warrant for arresting Bat Brindley?"

"Yes."

"Show it!"

All gazed at the bold speaker.

He was a man well known in Pioneer City as a miner, and was one to fear when aroused, for he had been in some desperate encounters.

"Injun Nick" they called him, for he had the look of a half-breed, and yet no man dared tell him he had Indian blood in his veins.

In answer to the demand that Buffalo Bill should show the warrant for the arrest of Bat Brindley, the scout simply pointed to his revolver.

"In many cases that might go, but it don't where Bat Brindley is concerned, for we know him here as an honest man—yes, know him better than we do you."

"Well, you'll get better acquainted with me, Injun Nick, if you interfere in my arrest of this man as an outlaw, so hands off unless you wish to make this your funeral."

"I'll make it yours!" yelled Injun Nick and his revolver was drawn in an instant; but, quick as was his act Buffalo Bill's movements were quicker and his weapon covered Injun Nick ere he could level his at the scout.

"Think better of it, pard," said the scout, coolly, and the man, beaten at his own game, turned on his heel and left the saloon, while the crowd burst forth in a cheer for Buffalo Bill.

"Well, doctor, how is the wound?"

"Not so bad as it might have been. The first joint of the forefinger is shot off, and the bullet cut through the flesh near the thumb, that is all."

"Colonel Buck, I give this prisoner to you for safe-keeping until I am ready to start with him in the morning to the fort," said Buffalo Bill.

"I shall hold him, sir, at your command, though I hope he can prove his innocence," and the colonel turned him over to two of his deputies, and calling the scout aside whispered:

"See here, Bill, look out for Injun Nick, for he is as deadly as a snake and as silent; he will strike you when you least suspect."

"I do not doubt it; but I do not regard him as dangerous just now; later he may be."

"Now come to the cabin of Bat Brindley and we will look it over and see what we can find there in the way of proof against him."

The colonel accompanied the scout to the cabin of Brindley, which stood apart from the others, and on the edge of the settlement.

As they neared it they saw a light within, and Colonel Buck whispered:

"Some one is there!"

"Injun Nick, my word for it."

"Then it will be a fight right here."

"Oh, no, for I'll get the drop on him," was the quiet reply, and, creeping up to the door, the scout found that it was ajar.

Some one was within, and quickly shoving open the door Buffalo Bill covered the man he beheld there and cried:

"Hands up, Injun Nick!"

Injun Nick it was, and caught wholly off his guard, for he had his arms full, a blanket in which some things had been wrapped up.

He dropped it and raised his hands above his head, while he said savagely:

"Do you intend to kill me, Buffalo Bill?"

"I guess I'd cheat the hangman if I did, yes, and save my own life perhaps; but what are you doing here?"

"It is none of your business."

"I have made it my business, and I wish to know."

"Well, as you are going to take Bat Brindley to the fort, I came to get his blankets and a change of clothes for him."

"He did not ask you to do so."

"No, but he is my friend, and I thought it but right."

"Well, I'll take them."

"No you won't! I'll—"

"Hold! if you value your life don't make me shoot you, for I'll do it, Injun Nick, and if you do not wish to also go to the fort, just skip."

"Don't be a fool, Injun Nick, for Bill knows what he is about," urged the colonel, now appearing in the door.

"All right; I'll go; but some day we'll meet on even terms, Buffalo Bill."

"Any time you see fit, Injun Nick," was the quiet reply, and the man stepped quickly out of the door and disappeared in the darkness, going back toward the Overland Saloon.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE HOME RUN.

BUFFALO BILL took the blanket bundle which he had made Injun Nick drop, down to the tavern with him, and placed it in the room he was to occupy for the night.

He saw Toby Hart about making an early start in the morning with his coach. The colonel said breakfast would be ready and the prisoner prepared for his journey to the fort, the doctor promising to again dress his wounded hand before he started.

There was a very ugly feeling about on account of Bat Brindley's capture by Buffalo Bill, for many believed him innocent, while others thought him guilty and openly said that he should not be sent to the fort for trial, but be strung up there and then, if he was really one of the band of Red Hands.

Many more urged that Buffalo Bill was trying to make capital for himself by accusing Brindley, and that he had, in the glance he had taken of him, been mistaken as to his identity.

There were two things, however, that carried out the scout's charge, and which the supporters of Bat Brindley could not get over, and also checked them in a determination to rescue him and give him a chance to prove his innocence there in Pioneer City and not be taken to Fort Advance.

These were the fact that Bat Brindley was often absent from Pioneer City, prospecting he said, and had been absent at the time Buffalo Bill claimed he was in ambush at Monument Hill, while he had come back with injuries which he had said were caused by the fall of his horse upon him.

The doctor had been appealed to and a demand made of him to state just what those injuries were.

He claimed a professional right to silence, but that did not go down in Pioneer City, and at last he was forced to speak, for Brindley his patient was a prisoner and very likely to hang, and his defenders were the ones whom he, the doctor, depended upon for future calls upon his services.

So the doctor said that the wounded shoulder had the signs of having been made by the bite of some animal with large mouth and dull teeth, that pinched the flesh, but did not penetrate the clothing and the flesh as would have been the case had a bear given the wound.

Then, too, there were several bad bruises upon the breast and one leg, as though from a blow dealt by a dull instrument, such as the iron-shod hoof of a horse.

This settled the fact in the minds of nearly every one that Buffalo Bill had made no mistake, and so no opposition was made to the taking of the prisoner away in the morning.

Anticipating that an effort might be made to rob him of his prisoner—for Buffalo Bill felt that Bat Brindley had lawless friends at his call in Pioneer City—the scout passed the night prepared to resist to the bitter end.

But, day dawned without any disturbance;

breakfast was ready on time; the coach, with Toby Hart on the box, rolled up to the door and the prisoner was led out and placed in it, hands manacled.

Buffalo Bill got in, also, while Lucifer, thoroughly trained, was told to trot along behind.

Early as it was a large crowd had gathered at the tavern to see the coach start, and half a dozen men had come to take passage on to the mines, but were told that the stage was carrying no passengers, not being on a regular run.

They seemed greatly disappointed, but there was nothing to be done other than submit to the scout's decision.

So the coach rolled away with Toby Hart on the box, Buffalo Bill and his prisoner inside and the faithful horse of the scout trotting close up behind with neither saddle nor bridle on him.

Toby Hart had been told by Buffalo Bill to drive rapidly to the first relay station, and he made the distance in good time, halting his horses panting and covered with sweat before the log-cabin where Mooney sat smoking his pipe after a late breakfast.

Toby had been over the trail to the fort several times before as an "extra," so knew it fairly well, and, as the scout suggested, would put his teams through, and running light would reach the terminus before dark, in spite of any delay at the bridge across Canyon River.

"Mooney, I want a good horse at once brought up and this saddle and bridle put on him," said Buffalo Bill as he got out of the coach, after throwing a saddle and bridle out.

"I don't think there is any in corral, save the coach team and my own riding horse, Bill."

"Then I will take your riding horse, Mooney."

"I doesn't allow anybody to ride him, you know."

"This time you must make an exception, for I'll take your horse, if you have no other in corral."

Mooney saw that the scout was in no mood to be trifled with and went off muttering:

"Wal, maybe there do be one of the animals about; I'll see."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TAMING A TOUGH.

THE moment that Mooney went to the corral for the six coach-horses, for a team always had to be kept on hand, and to find out if another animal than his own riding horse was near, Buffalo Bill called Toby Hart out of ear-shot of his prisoner and said:

"See here, Toby, you will have to go on alone, for I am sure that Injun Nick and a band intend to hold up the coach to rescue Brindley."

"I shouldn't wonder, Bill, for I am sure there was some under-hand game being played last night, and Injun Nick never forgives or forgets and he is a firm pard of Brindley."

"I shall, therefore, take to the saddle here, with my prisoner, and make a circuit of the stage trail, while you go on, and when held up, as I am convinced you will be, simply say that I took no chances and went by saddle to the fort."

"You're a dandy, Bill, and it takes a sharp one to match you," and Toby Hart laughed.

"I do not intend to neglect any card that may win, or to play one that will lose," was the scout's response.

Just then Mooney returned with the six coach-horses and a most insignificant looking beast that would not last half the journey.

"This is the only critter up, Bill, but he's a goer, and better than he looks."

"I'll leave him for you to learn to ride on, Mooney, and take your own horse, instead."

"No, you won't!" sullenly.

"See here, when you took this station, you did not own a horse, or even a gun, and the colonel put you here because you were in bad luck."

"Now, the horse you claim belongs to the stage company and I shall take him."

"Does you mean you'll take my horse?"

"I do if it is your horse, which I do not believe. I am riding in discharge of duty now, and I'll take what comes my way."

"I don't want no trouble with you, Buffalo Bill; but I is here to protect stage property, and I'll do it."

"See here, Mooney, you know that Buffalo Bill is only asking what is just. He is under orders from Colonel Carr at the fort, and you better not act the fool," Toby Hart warned.

"And, I am under orders from Colonel Buck, the boss of this end of the stage company."

Buffalo Bill had taken the lariat from the extra saddle he had brought along and started for the corral, paying no more attention to the stock-tender.

Seeing this, Mooney called out:

"If you goes there, you has it out with me, Buffalo Bill."

Mooney had dropped his hand upon his revolver, but, he was not prepared for the quick act of the scout, who had his revolver already in his hand with the lariat, and wheeling, covered the stock-tender before he could draw.

"Hands up, Mooney, or this station is without a tender! Up, mighty quick!"

The man raised his hand with a promptness that made Toby Hart laugh; he had heard of Buffalo Bill's deadly aim, and knew that he was a dangerous person to take chances with or to arouse to just anger.

"As yer holds winnin' keerds, Bill, I throws up my hands," he said, doggedly.

Buffalo Bill advanced upon him, unbuckled his belt, placed the weapons in the cabin, locked the door and said:

"Keep your eye on him, Toby, while I get the horse."

He soon returned from the corral, leading a splendid animal and remarked:

"Why, Mooney, there are a score of good horses in the corral, and your conduct would make a less suspicious man than I am, believe you wanted to have the Red Hands rescue Bat Brindley; but, that game don't work."

He saddled his own horse then, while Toby put the saddle and bridle upon the one he had brought for the prisoner, the stock-tender sullenly hitching up the fresh team.

"Will see you later, Toby," said Buffalo Bill, as the driver mounted his box and drove away.

Then the scout aided the prisoner to mount, and, taking the end of the lariat in hand, sprung into his own saddle.

"By the way, Mooney, here is your key," he said, as he rode away, and he tossed it over in some bushes.

The stock-tender sprung for it with a face that betrayed his vicious purpose to open the door, seize his weapons and fight it out with the scout.

But, Cody saw and read his purpose, and quickly covering him with his revolver said quietly:

"Mooney, you are a bad man, but I do not wish to kill you, and that you may not force me to do so, I order you to walk along the trail ahead of me."

"I'll die first."

"All right, if you wish it to be a case of suicide," and Buffalo Bill took deliberate aim.

"Don't shoot! You has me foul, so I caves!"

"You have got horse sense, Mooney."

"Just take a little pedestrian exercise ahead of me on that trail."

The man obeyed, and for half a mile Buffalo Bill made him walk in advance, and then said:

"Now go back, find your key, and try and forget that you have made a fool of yourself."

With this the scout and the prisoner rode on.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOLD UP.

"I DON'T wonder that Buffalo Bill has won the name he has, for he is as cool as ice, never excited, and means what he says."

So mused Toby Hart as he drove on his way with his empty coach after leaving the first relay station.

"I like the man, and he is true as steel."

"Bat Brindley is guilty, I am now sure, though I never suspected him; but Buffalo Bill isn't making any mistake this time."

"And he put a quietus on Mooney when

he told him that he acted as though he wanted the Red Hands to rescue Brindley."

"Mooney is a bad one, and Bill must look out for him."

"I am sorry I did not remain until he left with his prisoner, for he's treacherous as a snake, or his looks go back on him."

"Maybe I'll be held up on the trail. It won't be by the Red Hands, but those who wish to rescue Bat Brindley."

"Lord, but won't they swear and yowl!"

"I'll have to put cotton in my ears to keep from learning their oaths."

"If the Red Hands should halt me, which I am not looking for, as this is an extra run, why, they'll get next to nothing, for I did not even bring my own watch along," and Toby laughed all to himself as he took up his dinner-basket, opened it, and glanced in between two pieces of bread that appeared to be a sandwich, and revealed a watch there.

"I'm making good time," he muttered, as he saw the hour, and he kept his team at as brisk a pace as the nature of the trail would allow, while he mused half aloud as he drove along:

"Guess they'll halt me before I go much further, for the rescuers won't go very far from Pioneer City."

Hardly had the words been spoken when he saw two men step out in the trail ahead of him.

Involuntarily he glanced behind and saw two horsemen following him.

Further up the trail ahead a couple more horsemen rode into view, and were coming toward him.

"I thought so," he muttered. "Wonder if they'll call in my chips in their fury at not finding Bat aboard?"

Suddenly another form appeared in the trail, a hundred yards nearer than the two first seen on foot. He held a revolver in hand, leveled at Toby, while he called out in a voice not to be mistaken:

"Halt!"

"Every durned one of 'em is masked," and Toby put his foot on the brake, drew hard on his reins and brought his team to a halt.

"Toby Hart, we don't mean harm to you, but you have two passengers we want," cried the man close in front of the horses.

"You won't get 'em."

"Don't be a fool, for we are seven, and we have come prepared to kill, if kill we must."

"I am not a fool, but I say again you won't get those you want, if they are Buffalo Bill and Bat Brindley."

"We will rescue Brindley, and kill Buffalo Bill if he resists, for he must be taught that he cannot carry too high a hand in a country where the people's will is law."

"Just take 'em then if you can find 'em."

"What! are they not in the coach?" demanded the man.

"Not they."

The man dashed to the coach, risking all danger, threw open the door and yelled:

"Pards, they are not here."

"I told you so," coolly said Toby Hart.

"Where are they?"

"On another trail to Fort Advance."

"Eluded us?"

"It looks that way."

"They were to leave Pioneer City with you."

"And they did."

"Where did they quit the coach?"

"Bill, you see, is no play borderman to be taken in, so he concluded he'd leave the horse at Mooney's station and take to the saddle."

"And he did so?"

"He did for a certainty."

"And Brindley?"

"Went with him of course."

"And we have been foiled by Buffalo Bill?"

"It looks that way, Nick."

"Why do you call me Nick?" quickly asked the man.

Toby laughed as he answered:

"Mask or no mask, Injun Nick, I would know you in Hades."

"Your knowledge may cost you your life."

"Bah! all Pioneer City knows that you went out with your gang to get Bat Brindley from Buffalo Bill, so what's the good of killing me?"

"There was a blanket roll along belonging to Bat Brindley. It is on the coach."

"Guess not, for Buffalo Bill strapped it on behind his saddle, and I heard him remark that it would hang more men in Pioneer City than Bat Brindley."

The masked leader of the rescuers uttered an execration and then said:

"I believe you are in on this deal with Cody, Toby Hart."

"Being an honest man I am not in with road-agents, Nick."

"Drive on, and I advise you to keep your mouth shut as to who held up your coach; say we was Red Hand Riders."

"Might hit the truth if I did," muttered Toby as he started up his team, and was soon dashing rapidly on once more.

Looking back he saw that the masked men had hastily left the trail.

"They are going to head off Buffalo Bill," the driver decided.

CHAPTER XXX.

SEARCHING FOR PROOF.

BAT BRINDLEY felt that he was in a very dangerous situation.

He saw that the scout's cunning had nipped a rescue in the bud, if any was intended by his friends, but he resolved to delay Buffalo Bill all that he could. As he could do nothing else he suddenly pretended to be taken violently ill.

He at first said that he believed he had been poisoned—that something had been put in his food that morning at the hotel.

"I can go no further, for I feel that I am going to die," he declared, as he reeled in his saddle.

"Do you really think so, Brindley?"

"I am sure of it. Let me lie down here and die in peace."

The scout halted, took his lariat and threw the noose over the prisoner's neck. The other end he threw over the limb of a tree and made it fast to his saddle-horn.

Bat Brindley watched him with a look of wonder, groaning terribly the while.

As the scout dismounted he gasped:

"What are you going to do?"

"Hang you," was the quiet reply of Buffalo Bill.

"My God! What do you mean?"

"You said you were dying, and I have no time to wait here for you to die, and as you will be hanged for your crimes if you are tried at the fort, I shall just anticipate the verdict and sentence and be your executioner now."

"This is cruel, horrible."

"It is not a pleasant thing for me to have to do, Brindley, but I am compelled to it as you are unable to ride on."

"I believe I could ride on, for I feel better now."

"Yes, you look better."

"Shall we ride on, or do you wish to die here?"

"We will ride on."

The scout smiled grimly coiled his lariat and once more led the way.

Bat Brindley groaned terribly at times, but the scout knew well enough that his illness was feigned—that he hoped his friends would come up and rescue him.

Familiar as he was with the country Buffalo Bill bore afar off from the stage trail, determined to strike it by going to the Canyon River and then following its bank down to the bridge.

It was nearly night when he at last came in sight of the bridge, upon which the men under Captain Payne were just putting the finishing touches.

Riding up to the engineer-officer Buffalo Bill said:

"I have a prisoner here, Captain Payne, that I wish to leave in your charge."

"His name is Bat Brindley. I arrested him on suspicion of being secretly a member of the band of Red Hand Riders."

"Please say to the colonel that when I return I will make my charge with proofs; and that in this blanket so securely tied up, he may find a great deal that will interest him, and which I will explain upon my return to the fort."

"I will take your man myself to the fort, Buffalo Bill, for I shall go in with my men about noon to-morrow, my work here being

finished, and as the timber for the smaller bridges has been placed along the trail, they will soon be in position."

"You got the coach over all right to-day, sir?"

"Oh, yes; and Hart said that he was held up on the way by masked men, but he had nothing to be robbed of so was allowed to drive on."

"Some of your friends, Brindley; and led, I presume, by honest Injun Nick!"

"You see I was wise to leave the coach with you," said Buffalo Bill with a smile, while Bat Brindley uttered an oath at the thought of how near he had been to a rescue, but for the shrewdness of the scout.

Having turned his prisoner over to the keeping of Captain Payne, Buffalo Bill went to the camp where he had left one of his scouts, and gave him certain orders.

He then visited the others in the pines, and after giving them orders as to what he wished them to do, had supper with them, and, mounting his horse, rode on down the river-bank, evidently having some definite destination in view.

It was after midnight when he halted, staked Lucifer and his pack horse out and made his camp for the balance of the night.

In the morning he went on foot to the river, and reached it at a spot where it came out of the canyon, its narrow cliff banks, and widened out among hills and timber land.

"Above here there is no lodging place for any drift the river may have brought down, but below, on each side, there are places where the coach, the team or bodies might be cast ashore— Ah! there is a timber of the bridge now," and sweeping the banks below with his glass the scout's eyes fell upon something that had been cast ashore and caught his vision.

The river had run down from a flood to its normal flow, and the mark of the height the waters had attained were to be seen on the banks.

Here and there it had overflowed into a vale, canyon or meadow, and the scout glanced all about for any refuse that might be left there, as he went on down to the piece of timber he had caught sight of.

He soon reached it, and found that it was one of the bridge timbers that spanned the narrow canyon, and near it were several other pieces, those that had served as flooring.

Going back to his camp Buffalo Bill brought his horses up and then began to ride slowly on down the river.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SCOUT'S DISCOVERY.

BUFFALO BILL had set out to find some trace of the coach, team or passengers, or their baggage.

He knew that if the coach had gone down with the bridge, and every timber of the latter was found, near it would be a fragment of the coach, baggage, one of the six horses, the harness or the body of some one of the unfortunate passengers.

Of course in such a torrent the coach would be torn apart, the harness would break and thus separate the horses, and of all, with the baggage, if some parts of the bridge were found there certainly would be proof that Jack Jessop's stage and all in it had gone down or not.

With this argument for and against, Buffalo Bill set out to make a most thorough search of the Canyon River bank down which he was going, and, after having gone as far as he deemed advisable, to return up the stream on the other shore.

If he should find other pieces of the bridge, and not one thing to indicate that the coach had gone down with it, the scout would be thoroughly convinced that his theory was right, that the road-agents and not the storm were responsible for the very mysterious disappearance of the stage and its passengers, though of course aided by the tempest which had happened at that time.

Jotting down in his note-book the pieces of timber he found, as he came to them, and quantities of other drift, Buffalo Bill continued slowly on his way until night-fall, when he halted to camp for the night.

All along the severe effects of the storm

were visible, trees were uprooted, others broken off, limbs scattered about, large rocks had been detached from mountain-sides and sent crushing down into the valley, while the streams had all overflowed beyond their banks.

Three of the main timber spans of the bridge had been found, and these, with the one remaining across the chasm, accounted for the four heavy pieces.

Of the cross-pieces, which served as flooring, and were about a foot in width, seventy one logs had been found, and it was the calculation of the scout that there had been only about a hundred of them, or very few more, as the actual span of the bridge that was floored had been one hundred and ten feet.

After going a mile the next morning Buffalo Bill had come upon the pieces of the bridge-railing and a dozen more of the cross-logs, and yet not the slightest sign of a dead human body, horse, fragment of the coach, harness or piece of baggage.

Before him were the rapids, and at low water, with the river spreading to a quarter of a mile in width, the water for a long distance was not over two feet in depth.

Buffalo Bill felt that there was no need of going below these rapids, for certainly the coach could not be forced over them, nor would the body of a horse, unless at high water.

The bridge in fragments had lodged all along on the bank the scout had traveled, and certainly some part of the coach, one of the horses, the passengers' bodies, or the baggage would have done the same.

"I am now convinced that the coach did not go down with the bridge, but to make my proof perfect, I will cross below the bridge and go up the other side," decided Bill.

Pushing on several miles below the rapids to secure a good crossing, Bill suddenly came upon a camp in a thick pine forest!

The camp was deserted; there was no trail leading to it, from the direction the scout came, and there were indications that it had been occupied during and after the storm.

Buffalo Bill was all interest at once; so, dismounting, he staked his horse out and prepared to remain there all night.

He was all of forty miles from the bridge across Canyon River. The nearest habitation of a white man he knew of was the settlement about the fort; yet here was a camp made by a dozen or more people.

There were freshly cut boughs to form wicky-ups, to shelter the campers from the storm, and there were remains of several camp-fires, enough shelters to protect a score of people, and, near by, the indication that fully two dozen horses had been staked out for at least a day and night.

Then, too, when no trail led to the camp, a broad one led away from it.

Bill gave a low whistle and sat down to meditate.

As he sat there his eyes fell upon a strange looking trail to and from the river. It had the appearance of a number walking to and fro on it.

Then another thing caught his eye, a piece of painted charred wood.

"A piece of the coach, by all that's good!" cried the scout, and, springing to his feet, he at once began poking in the ashes of the camp-fires, unearthing several bolts, the handle of a coach door and the iron off of a hub of a wheel, while, glancing into one of the wicky-ups, he gave a shout at what he beheld there.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LIGHT ON THE TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL started into the wicky-up, where his gaze fell upon something there that caused him to start and his face to brighten, and bending over he dragged out a cushion.

It was just such a one as was used on the rear seat of the Overland coaches, and had been placed in the brush shelter for the comfort of some one.

Cody regarded it with a look of positive admiration, and mused aloud:

"They were very cunning, but not enough so. I need not go up the other shore, unless this trail leads that way, and I do not believe that it does.

"My first belief was right, that the coach never went down with the bridge!"

"The set of the stream was all toward this side, for that is shown by the fact that I have found nearly every piece of the bridge, here

"The Red Hands got the coach, took advantage of the storm to cut the bridge down and let it be supposed that it went down with it.

"Then, too, their trail was destroyed by the storm, and they traveled all night to this point with the coach, and through that tempest.

"Then, as the trail would not allow their taking the stage further, they burned it

"Well, it was mighty cunning in them, but not cunning enough, for they did not clean up their work well, as here is a piece of the coach not fully consumed and bolts and the door-handle.

"The rest of the telltale pieces were taken to the river and thrown in.

"Then, too, some one forgot to take this cushion with them!

"They came to this camp during the storm and traveled all night to do so.

"They camped here the next day and night, from appearances, and then left with their booty and prisoners, for they had the six stage-horses to aid them, and they always move with pack-animals of their own, when the hand goes out in force, and they were all out that night, that is pretty evident.

"Clever, very, but not clever enough, for I can follow their trail, and though behind them a day and night, I'll get there all the same."

Thus ran the scout's thoughts; and in the face of, to him, the most convincing facts that his first belief regarding the mysterious disappearance of the stage was right, he felt that he had gained half the battle by his discovery.

His horses had had a good rest, and would still have another night, while grass was plentiful for their food.

He made himself comfortable for the night, in the wicky up where he had found the cushion of the coach, cooked a good supper, and then sat down to enjoy his pipe and meditate.

Not a dread of danger came to him there, for he knew there was nothing to bring the Indians to that locality, and the road-agents would certainly not retrace their trail to that point, for their desire would be to reach their retreat and lay low, wishing to have it fully believed that the coach could have disappeared in no other way than by going down with the bridge, as everything certainly indicated had been the case.

Having finished his pipe, Bill turned in to get a good sleep and be fresh for his heavy work on the morrow.

But, though he at once sunk to sleep, in a short while he awakened. He tried to go to sleep again, but in vain; so he arose, for his frontier training had given him the instinct almost of a dog.

He felt that there was danger of some kind about.

What it was he could not fathom, but he had a presentiment of evil.

Rising, he determined to make a scout around his camp.

"I feel that some danger is near, and it cannot be a bear either—it is human."

So he went to where his horses were staked out, and found them safe, but Lucifer was not feeding and seemed nervous.

"You feel that there is danger about also, old fellow," he said.

"I will look it up."

The horse seemed to at once be satisfied.

His master was on the alert and all was safe, so he went to cropping grass again.

Up the stream, back on his trail, went Buffalo Bill for fully half a mile.

He was about to turn back when his eyes caught a glimmer ahead.

"A camp-fire and no mistake," he muttered.

Then he advanced slowly and with the greatest caution.

As he neared the fire he saw that it had been built in a thicket on a slight rise.

He leveled his night glass and beheld in the flat below four horses feeding.

"Road-agents, for they can be nothing else," he decided, and crept nearer and nearer.

At last he was near enough to get a view of the camp. He saw a form pacing to and fro between him and the firelight, while near the fire were men wrapped in their blankets, asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOES ON THE TRAIL.

BUFFALO BILL saw enough to warn him of his danger. There were foes upon his trail, for, if not following him, what were they doing there?

They kept a man on watch, which showed that they were on the alert for danger.

Could it be some of his own men following him for some purpose?

He must know that at once.

To do this he must take big chances, but he would do that.

Creeping around the hill he approached the spot where the horses were feeding, for he knew that near them would be found their saddles and bridles.

His own scouts all rode the same kind of saddles and had bridles and accouterments alike.

At last he found the spot where they had been left and carefully ran his hands over them, looking also as well as he could in the darkness.

"They are not my men, and they are not soldiers. Nor are they Red Hands, for they are uniformed in their riding equipments.

"Who are they?"

The scout crept slowly away, and at last reached a place of safety, when he arose and retraced his steps toward his own camp.

He was lost in thought, for he was puzzled as to who were in that night camp.

He dared not take them for friends, so must consider them foes until he had proof to the contrary.

Suddenly it flashed upon him who they might be.

"It's dollars to dimes that it is Injun Nick and his gang! Yes; I feel sure of it, for having held up Toby Hart's coach, and knowing I gave them the slip, they set off to find my trail, hit the one I left after getting my pack-horse and starting down the river, and they think that I am, to avoid them, making a long flank movement to reach the fort.

"That is the way I read it now, and as night caught them on my trail they camped.

"I'll just light out, but all traces of the destroyed coach goes with me."

He gathered up the bits of iron and the cushion, brought his horses up and stowed away the things on the pack-animal, after which he mounted and rode away on the trail which he had seen in the daylight, and which the road-agents had taken.

By the nature of the land he could follow this trail in the darkness for a couple of miles, and had no intention to abandon tracking the Red Hands.

Then, too, Bill had made up his mind to go into ambush and take the chances with his pursuers.

Being in ambush was half the battle, and having extra weapons along, he would be able to get into a good position to discover just who his prisoners were and to stand them off.

After a ride of a couple of miles he came to a point where he was not sure which way the trail went; so he looked about for a feeding-ground for his horses, found it, and then made search for a place of ambush.

He could not have found a better spot had he made it to order for himself, for it was a group of rocks, covering the top of a rise, and with a score of stunted pines growing among them.

Just behind him was a vale in which were his horses, and through which a small creek ran.

With the air of one holding perfect confidence in himself, he wrapped his blankets about him and sunk to sleep.

He awoke in the nick of time, changed the grazing-places of his horses to a fresh spot, watered them at the little rivulet, saddled them, leaving the bit slipped out of Lucifer's mouth, and then returned to reconnoiter his position.

He was much pleased with it, for he held command of a rocky pass, and for several hundred yards in his front.

It was broad daylight now, but Buffalo

Bill knew if the men in the camp had started as soon as they were able to follow the trail, they must be at the wicky-ups, for they would surely halt there for awhile to consider.

So he sat down and ate a cold breakfast with real relish, notwithstanding the suspense and danger he was in.

As he put away his haversack of food, and got all ready for flight or fight, the sun peered over the hilltops, and he saw all about him with evident satisfaction at his point of advantage.

The minutes went slowly by, and at last the patient waiter was rewarded by seeing a horseman come into view.

"Injun Nick, by the gods of war!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he recognized the staunch friend of Bat Brindley, and between whom and himself there now was war to the knife and knife to the hilt.

Just behind Injun Nick rode two others, and Buffalo Bill recognized a couple of the men who had been the defenders of Brindley at the Overland tavern.

Following these, and in lead, was a pack-horse.

This accounted for the four horses the scout had seen feeding near the camp, and he muttered quietly:

"Three to one."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREE TO ONE.

"HALT! Hands up all of you!"

The command came like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky to those who heard it.

The three riders obeyed the command; then they, as one man, slipped over the backs of their horses and thus remained sheltered.

Injun Nick had set the example, and Buffalo Bill from his ambush laughed at the alacrity shown.

The three were following a trail. They had come to the conclusion that the one they followed had left camp early, before the break of day, and was all of a dozen miles ahead of them. They had not looked for an ambush.

Of course there could be but one man to dread, so they had slipped behind their horses for shelter, and, thus protected, Injun Nick called out:

"We know you, Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, and I am not proud of the acquaintance. But what are you doing on my trail?"

"You know."

"Are you ashamed to tell me, or afraid?"

"I want the man you hold as a prisoner, Bat Brindley, my pard."

"I hav'n't got him."

"Don't lie, for you left Pioneer in the stage-coach with him, and then took to the saddle at Mooney's station."

"I did; but what then?"

"We took your trail and have tracked you here."

"You got mixed on the trails, I guess."

"No, we did not, for we know that you have Bat Brindley a prisoner with you, and are now making for the fort with him."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

The scout laughed.

Injun Nick did not like the laughter; it grated on his ears, and he called out:

"It will be our turn to laugh last."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Give up Bat Brindley to us, and we won't harm you."

"Thanks, awfully."

"We mean it."

"If I give up Brindley to you, I can go free?"

"Yes."

"You will make no effort to follow me?"

"No."

"Do you mean it?"

"I swear I do."

"Your oath is about as much to be trusted as you are; but, suppose I refuse?"

"Then we will take Brindley from you."

"You must have more men than I see to make such a threat."

"We have."

"Where are they?"

"Coming back on the trail."

Again the scout laughed, and then said:

"See here, Injun Nick, while you were asleep I went to your camp last night, so I know that you three are all I have to deal

with, and three to one, with such as you, I do not look upon as too great odds, especially when I hold the winning hand."

"We will down you, Buffalo Bill, mark my words."

"How?"

"You are a long way from help, and we are three to one against you, while you have a prisoner to guard as well."

"Who?"

"Why Bat Brindley."

"He is not with me."

"Again I say don't lie."

"All right. If you make any effort to rescue him, I will have to see to it that he does not bother me."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, to kill him, of course."

"You would not dare do that."

"Self-preservation, you know, Nick."

"I don't wish to fight you, for I've got nothing against you, as you were doing your duty, as you saw it, in arresting him; but, as Bat is my friend, and I do not wish to see him hung, if you will give him up we will call it quits, drop our quarrel and go our separate ways."

"Well, all I can say is that, if his life stood between me and death, through your attack upon me, he would have to turn up his toes."

"All right; I'd rather have you kill him than have him hang, but if you did, we would avenge him."

"See here, we are losing time. I have not got Bat Brindley with me."

"I know better."

"I tell you, on my honor, I have not, for I turned him over to Captain Payne at the Canyon River Bridge day before yesterday."

"That is not so, for your trail showed two horses."

"Very true, but Bat Brindley is not the man riding the second horse."

"Who is?"

"You will know when you are curious enough to attempt to find out."

"I do not believe you."

"All right; play your cards and you will find that I have the trumps."

Injun Nick, nonplused at this, turned, to his two companions, all three still keeping hidden behind their horses, and they held a consultation.

Much as they hated the scout they knew that no man was squarer in his actions, and he would not deliberately lie to them.

If it was not Bat Brindley with him, who was the other man? for they confidently expected to find two, not suspecting that Cody had a pack-horse.

Two against three would greatly reduce the odds which they thought they had, of three to one, supposing the prisoner to be bound and helpless.

Then, too, if there were two, in such a position the odds were in favor of those in ambush by a large majority.

Bill waited patiently for their consultation, for he felt that if he was not master of the situation they certainly did not hold the winning hand against him.

At last Injun Nick called out:

"Do you take oath, Buffalo Bill, that Bat Brindley is not with you?"

"My word I hold as good as my oath, and I tell you that he is not."

"Who is?"

It might have been a mistake, but the scout risked it and said:

"No one!"

"You have two horses?"

"One is a pack-animal."

Hardly had the words been uttered when three rifles flashed together without warning and the bullets were sent to kill.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BUFFALO BILL'S DEADLY BRAND.

THE shots were fired almost as one, by the three pursuers, the moment they were convinced that they had only the scout to deal with.

They had consulted and Injun Nick had ordered:

"At a signal, men, pull on the scout, for we can get him before he dodges our bullets, not expecting us to fire."

"That will leave but one, but, that one

will not be Buffalo Bill and that means much.

"If Bat is his prisoner, we rescue him, and if he is not, and another man is there, we will soon finish him."

When therefore the scout stated that Bat Brindley was not along, and also that he was alone, Injun Nick gave the signal and the three rifles flashed together.

The quick eyes of Injun Nick saw the hat and form of Buffalo Bill disappear behind the rock which had sheltered him, as the shots struck their target.

"We've got him, pards," yelled Injun Nick triumphantly, and the three started toward the rocks, the two men springing away from their horses, while their leader still kept under cover.

The act was fatal to them, for Buffalo Bill had been looking for treachery, and watching the movements of the men like a hawk, his blanket and hat had been what the shots had stricken, while the scout himself, was several feet distant; he had calmly taken in the situation and so was wholly unharmed.

One bullet pierced his hat; the other two were buried in his blankets, as Injun Nick and his two comrades were the deadliest of shots with rifle and revolver.

Seeing the blanket and hat disappear—for the scout had toppled them over—the ruffians were wild with delight, and as stated two of them sprung at a run for the rocks, but the shrewder Injun Nick still remained sheltered by his horse.

His wisdom was shown when, suddenly, the form of Buffalo Bill appeared and two shots rung out in quick succession.

First one, then the other of the men who had exposed themselves went down, while Injun Nick, seizing the reins of one of his comrades' horses, with his own animal in hand also, started off at a run for shelter.

A few shots rattled after him, but the scout had fired not to kill the horses, but the man.

He clipped the shoulder of Injun Nick lightly with one bullet, while a second shattered his revolver butt in his belt, the shock bringing the man to his knees, and causing him the sensation of being hard hit.

But he sped on, and was soon in the saddle flying for dear life.

He had no desire to take chances alone with Buffalo Bill, so was only anxious to get out of range and danger.

He glanced back as he ran, as though expecting the scout to pursue, and was ready to let go his led horse should he discover him, for Injun Nick, brave as he was, had become panic-stricken now and was in that state of alarm which makes the bravest men arrant cowards.

On, on, he sped and only breathed more freely when, after a run of several miles, he came to a hill-top which gave him a view of the trail for a long distance back and he did not see his enemy coming.

"If dead, he will bury them, and if wounded care for them, for I know the man," he muttered.

"I have but one course open for me now, as I dare not live in Pioneer City; but I must go there and get my traps; then it will be a life of outlawry with me."

"I have no time to lose, for he may go to the settlement ahead of me."

"If those men are not dead I fear they will tell all, and that surely means a rope for me."

"I'm glad I've got two horses, at least," and he put all of his extra traps, rifle and blanket on the led animal to lighten the one he rode of all weight that he could.

Then he pushed on once more, his face dark and revengeful, expressing the feelings he held in his heart as he mounted.

"Yes, I'll devote my life now to killing Buffalo Bill."

In the mean time Buffalo Bill had made no effort to follow Injun Nick, save with his bullets.

"It is but a question of time, so let him go—now," he muttered, as, rifle in hand, ready to fire at a movement of the two prostrate forms, he left his shelter and walked toward them.

"Dead," he said laconically, as he bent over one of them and saw where the bullet had crashed through his brain.

"This one is alive, but badly if not fatally hurt."

"This killing one's fellow being is a terrible business, and yet it was kill or be killed, in their case."

"I will see what I can do for the poor fellow."

Laying his rifle aside, he bent over the man whose eyes were fixed upon him and who said in a faint tone:

"Nothing, pard, for I've got my death wound."

"Maybe not so bad as that," and the scout spoke kindly, placed the man in a more comfortable position and gave him a drink from his canteen.

"Yes, I can't last long; but, I have only myself to blame for it, not you."

"You are kind, to say the least."

"I am just, now that death's shadow is upon me."

"Who are you?"

"Once a wild, wayward boy, who broke my mother's heart and went to the bad."

"Now I am suffering just punishment for all the misdeeds of my life, dying as an outlaw in this wild land, with the man I sought to kill my only friend, deserted by the man who led me on this trail that ends my life," and the voice now was firm and distinct as he uttered his repentant words.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DYING OUTLAW.

THE man gazed at Buffalo Bill no longer as one he hated, but with an expression as though he was all the friend he had to cling to in his dying hour.

The scout was deeply moved, for he saw in the dying man one who had been well born and reared, and whose own reckless life had brought him to a death of violence as an outlaw.

He felt sorry for him, sorry that he had been the one to have to kill him.

But he saw that there was no help for him, as the gray pallor of death was creeping over his face, and he knew that his wound was fatal.

"I wish that your wound had been only a slight one, so that you might recover and lead a different life," he said, with sympathetic tone.

"Oh! how I wish that it was so!"

"But I do not blame you, Buffalo Bill, for we sought to kill you and were three to one against you."

"We started out to rescue Bat Brindley, and when he was not in the stage coach Injun Nick determined to start upon your trail."

"We pressed on at night, crossed a trail the next day of two horses, which Injun Nick said was yours, as he knew the track of your horse well."

"The rest of the band would follow no further, for they had come only to rescue Brindley from the coach, and so turned back."

"But they were employed for that work alone, while Dandy there, and I, were in Injun Nick's pay, so we came on with him."

"This is the result."

"And who is Injun Nick?" asked the scout, quietly, for he had listened to the low-uttered words of the dying man with deepest interest.

"He is Bat Brindley's right hand man, and Dandy and I were his assistants."

"To do what?"

The man was silent a moment and then said:

"As I have done no good in life, I may do something that is not wicked in dying, so I'll make a clean breast of it."

"You would die with an easier conscience if you did."

"Dandy there could have told you more than I can; but he is dead."

"I am a late member of Injun Nick's gang; but I do know that Bat Brindley is a spy for the Red Hand Riders—that he uses Injun Nick to do the underhand work and Dandy and I were helpers."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, we were couriers to take messages to the chief of the Red Hands, when a treasure coach was coming through."

"And Bat Brindley was the main mover?"

"Oh, yes, he and the chief of the Red

Hands are firm pards, and he has men in his employ all along the Overland Trail who report any move of value to him, which enables the Red Hands to make a haul."

"And you are a Red Hand?"

"Indirectly, yes, for I was a courier for them."

"And Injun Nick is one?"

"Not a member of the band in the field, nor was Bat Brindley; but both were spies."

"Where are the Red Hands?"

"They are at one of their retreats, I suppose."

"Where are their retreats?"

"That I do not know."

"Or knowing will not tell?"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"I will tell all I know."

"But even Injun Nick does not know where their retreats are located."

"How did you act as courier then?"

"We went on stated dates to certain points where we met some member of the band proper, and gave him the letter from Brindley and received communications for him from the chief in return."

"Have you any objection to telling where these places of rendezvous are?"

"One is at Monument Hill, every Sunday."

"Yes," and Buffalo Bill wrote it down in his note-book.

"Another is at the bridge across Canyon River."

"What day?"

"Every Wednesday."

"Yes."

"The third is at Mooney's Station."

"What day?"

"Friday."

"What hour?"

"Any hour between sunrise and sunset on the days named, for plenty of time is given."

"And Mooney is a member of the Red Hands' band?"

"Not a riding member, but what is called an ally."

"Such as you are?"

"Yes."

"Are the other stock-tenders also members?"

"No; only Mooney."

"I thought as much."

"But now tell me if you have given any late information to the Red Hands?"

"Yes, I carried the news to Mooney last Friday a week ago of the going through of the daughter of a sergeant at the fort with plenty of luggage, and others, too, who were booked and would be fat fish to fry, for the news was sent through by Pony Express to Brindley."

"I see."

"And the Red Hands made their haul?"

"They intended to, but the coach went down with the Canyon River bridge and all were lost."

Buffalo Bill looked fixedly into the face of the man as though to see if he was keeping back anything, and then said:

"Do you know that the coach went down?"

"It never appeared at the fort and could not be found, while the bridge went down in the storm, and Mooney so reported it."

The scout saw that the man believed what he said, and asked:

"Do you have any idea of the whereabouts of the retreats of the Red Hands?"

"No; they keep that a dead secret, only the riders knowing."

"And Bat Brindley was a rider?"

"Oh, yes."

Buffalo Bill saw that the man was rapidly growing weaker, and so asked:

"What is your name?"

"Leonard Lorne."

"Have you any message to leave to any one? for I will faithfully attend to it."

"No; my parents are dead, and all my brothers and sisters were estranged from me long ago, therefore merely write to the county clerk of my native town that I am dead, so that that fact will be established, and I will not be a stumbling-block to the settlement of an estate when the youngest heir is of age."

"My name and address are in a leather wallet that I have on me, and what money there is, with the other things you find on my body, express to the county clerk."

"I will do it."

"And your hand, that took my life, will dig my grave?"

"Yes, you shall be decently buried, and your grave marked, I promise you."

"Buffalo Bill, you my slayer, are my only friend now, in my dying hour—God bless you!"

The scout grasped the hand that sought his own, and thus clasping it, remained until the life of the repentant outlaw fluttered out of the casket of clay.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRAIL CONTINUED.

BUFFALO BILL had never felt more impressed in his life, at the death of a dear friend, than he did in sitting by the side of the dying outlaw, Leonard Lorne, and listening to his last words.

It was not only that his hand had been the one to take his life that caused him to feel so deeply, but the man after all had a good heart, and, sorry for the past, had confessed it, and died with the scout his only friend.

When at last he ceased to breathe, Buffalo Bill clasped the hands upon his breast, after he had taken off his belt of arms and the things he found upon him, along with a seal ring and an old-fashioned watch.

Wrapping the body in his blanket, he then went to the other dead form.

Dandy, as Lorne had called him, was a bad man clean through, one of the desperado type and of a different kind, altogether, to the one whom the scout had stood by in his last moments.

But Buffalo Bill just as tenderly folded the stiffened hands and wrapped his blanket about him.

Then he caught the horse of Dandy, for Injun Nick had run off with Lorne's horse, and led him to where his own animals were pastured.

He seemed not to take any precaution against Injun Nick's coming back, for he had realized that a panic had seized him by the way he fled, and that he would not halt until compelled to do so.

Going to his own pack Buffalo Bill took from it a small shovel, and a hatchet, tools he always carried with him, as well as a pick.

With the pick and shovel he began to dig a grave, and near it another one, for he was determined to bury the two men apart, in case the family of Leonard Lorne might wish to find his body.

The graves were dug at last, the bodies placed in them, saplings cut and fastened over them and rocks piled on top to keep the coyotes from digging them up.

Then into the tree at the head of Lorne's grave Buffalo Bill cut the name in the bark and the date.

It was nightfall now, so he went into camp where the pasture was good for his horse.

The night passed away in quiet, the scout seeming to have no haunting specters to disturb his slumber; but bright and early he was up, had cooked and dispatched a hearty breakfast, and lessening the load on the pack-animal by dividing it with the outlaw's horse, he started off on the trail he had been following just as it grew light enough to see it.

He had a mission to perform which, though delayed in, he had by no means relinquished.

He would continue on the trail of the Red Hands, who he now felt assured had held up the coach of Jack Jessop, captured its prisoners, destroyed the bridge to give the idea that it had gone down with the stage in the storm, and then retreating rapidly, had burned up, as they believed, all proof of their crime and retreated to their secret haunts with all dispatch.

Buffalo Bill was now convinced, when before he had held only a suspicion that the Red Hands were the guilty ones.

Of course it was only conjecture on his part as to the fate of those in the coach.

He had found no dead body, come upon no freshly made grave, and yet Jack Jessop and some of his passengers might have been killed.

The scout believed that the fair passengers, Lucille Fallon, and the others too, would be held prisoners, to get ransom for after awhile, and a large enough price to enable

the Red Hands to fly the country once they got hold of it.

The companion of Leonard Lorne had given him data to work upon.

The secret haunts of the Red Hands were known only to those who were riders in the raids, the fighting members of the band.

That Bat Brindley was one of these the scout felt no doubt now, and he would hold him in reserve for future use, he decided.

The fact that Mooney was an ally was a gratification to know, and he was anxious to reach his station before Injun Nick could get there and give the alarm.

Then, too, the fact that he knew where on three days he might be able to meet three members of the band, come for information, the scout considered greatly in his favor.

So he pressed rapidly on along the trail of the Red Hands, determined to follow it until it crossed the stage trail, in which direction it led.

There he would leave it to swoop down upon Mooney, and he might force further information from him.

With the rest the horses had had he did not spare them, after leaving the scene which had so nearly proven fatal to him.

As he had believed, the trail of the Red Hands crossed the stage trail, but there was an effort to conceal it there, the horses having been led across at different points, and with their hoofs muffled.

But following the trail as Buffalo Bill had this did not deceive him at all.

The trail was a large one, and made after a heavy storm was most plainly marked, while the number of horses along made it as easy to follow as a wagon road.

Having crossed the trail and picked it up where the horses united on the other side, Buffalo Bill at once sought a camping-place for his horses, and mounted upon the animal ridden by Dandy, and with the dead outlaw's clothes and hat as a disguise, rode rapidly toward the station where Mooney was the stock-tender.

He hoped to reach there ahead of Injun Nick, who from the direction in which he had fled, would have to follow up to Canyon River and then take the stage trail, all of a day's further ride than the scout had made.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S MYSTERIOUS MOVEMENTS.

MOONEY, the stock-tender, had been in a very sullen mood, after the departure of Buffalo Bill and his prisoner.

He felt that he had made a mistake to in any way antagonize the scout, for it would only bring trouble to him, perhaps the belief that he might not be all that he professed to be.

He saw the men that had not gone with Injun Nick, returning to Pioneer City the day after, and he had questioned them closely as to how matters had gone.

They could only tell him that they were sorry they had been roped into the affair, and had refused to go further with Injun Nick in his hunt for Buffalo Bill and his prisoner.

"This made Mooney feel more at ease, when he heard that Injun Nick had gone on Buffalo Bill's trail with Leonard Lorne and Dandy, two men of unflinching courage.

"Injun Nick will kill Cody and rescue Bat Brindley sure as shootin', and as Bill is the only one to kick against me I'll be all right.

"Dandy hates the scout, as much as Nick does, and has told me before he intended some day to lay him out, and Len Lorne seems to hate every man who is leading an honest life.

"Well, I'll just wait and see how things turn out."

So mused Mooney as he sat alone in front of his cabin, smoking his pipe and pondering over the occurrences of the past few days.

Suddenly he glanced up the trail and saw a horseman coming into view.

He was mounted on a large spotted horse, and came along at a walk.

"It's Dandy, or I'm a liar."

"And he's alone," said Mooney, and he called out

"Ho, old pard, glad to see you."

"I'm glad, too, Pard Mooney," was the

response and the horseman drew rein and suddenly dropped his Winchester-muzzle to cover the breast of the stock-tender.

"Hands up quick, Mooney!"

"Great God! it's Buffalo Bill!" gasped the man, but he obeyed.

"Yes, I'm back to see you, Mooney."

"I thought you was Dandy, my pard."

"Only outwardly, Mooney, for I wear his coat and hat and ride his horse."

"Turn your back to me."

"Are you going to shoot me?"

"Oh, no, I shall not cheat the gallows of you."

"Quick, obey me."

The man obeyed and slipping from his saddle, Buffalo Bill quickly disarmed him.

Then he cast his lasso over his arms and ordering the man to lower them, pinioned them together securely.

Having tied his prisoner effectually, Buffalo Bill went into the cabin and searched it thoroughly.

He seemed to find a few things of interest there, for he came out with a blanket bundle securely tied up.

"Now, Mooney, I'll saddle a horse for you, and the station must take care of itself until I send a man to care for it for a few days, when Colonel Buck can get a regular stock-tender and one who is not the villain you are."

"I hav'n't done anything wrong."

"Well, that is to be seen when you are tried; but it is my opinion you have done enough to hang you."

"Just because I didn't want you to take one of my horses."

"Oh no, not that; but I'll soon be ready for you," and in ten minutes the scout came from the corral with two good horses saddled and bridled, for he had ridden Dandy's horse hard and so left him at the station.

It was nearly night now and the scout having forced Mooney to mount, went back along the trail at a gallop.

He did not halt at the camp where he had left Lucifer and his pack-horse, but pushed on at a swift pace to the pine thicket near the Canyon River where he had stationed one of his scouts to wait for him.

The scout was in the hut and hearing his approach arose and hailed:

"Halt!"

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"It is all right, Jack," answered Buffalo Bill, and the door opened and the scout stepped out.

"Glad to see you, chief, for I was getting anxious about you."

"I'm all right, and I am glad to see you on the alert."

"Mount your horse and ride with all speed down to where Will Palmer is stationed, and bring him back with you."

"I will in the mean time write several letters I wish you to deliver in all haste to Marsden on the other side of the river, and have him push with them to the fort, while you go down at a slow pace and relieve Brockway of his duty, after which you can return to your station here and meet Toby Hart's coach as it comes along to-morrow afternoon."

It did not take Jack Harding three minutes to saddle up and be off on his errand, and having made his prisoner comfortable for a sleep on the floor of the hut if he wished, Buffalo Bill threw some wood on the fire and by its light wrote page after page on a pad of paper and with a pencil he had with him.

When he had finished his task he had three letters written and addressed, in envelopes he also had along with him.

Just before dawn Jack Harding came back accompanied by Will Palmer, the scout whom Buffalo Bill had stationed further down the river to be within call when needed.

"Well, Palmer, I made a flank movement, so did not return your way; but I wish you to go at once to Mooney's station and take charge there. You may look for a visit from Injun Nick of Pioneer City, or may find him there."

"In either case I want him, but don't kill him unless you have to do so in self-defense."

"I understand, chief," said Will Palmer, who was a tall, slender, wiry, handsome young fellow, every inch a frontiersman and most popular among his fellows.

He had "grit" written on every feature of his face, and was known as a daring Indian fighter, a dead shot and fine roper and rider.

"Harding will be along with the coach to-morrow to keep you company, and I have written you some private instructions here," and the colonel handed Will Palmer a slip of paper, after receiving which he mounted his horse and rode away with a curious glance at the prisoner who pretended to be asleep.

"Now, Jack, I wish you to take these letters and this prisoner, and turn them all over to Marsden, who will push on to the fort with all haste, while you ride down to relieve Brockway.

"Then you come back here and join Toby Hart as he comes along to-morrow and go to Mooney's station and await further orders there with Harding."

"Yes, chief."

"And Brockway?"

"Give him this, for I have written down his instructions."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OBEYING ORDERS.

JACK HARDING took the letters and the slip of paper and put them carefully away.

Then he called to the prisoner to get up and go with him.

Mooney seemed to be sleeping soundly, but awoke very quickly when Harding gave him a grip on the shoulder that was painful.

"Come, you are awake, and I want your company on a ride," said the scout, and Mooney arose with an oath.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I leave you in good company, Mooney, and send you to Colonel Carr," said Buffalo Bill.

Mooney's face paled, but he said nothing in reply, and was soon tied in his saddle, and with the bridle-rein of his horse held by Jack Harding was on his way to the fort, while Buffalo Bill rode away in the opposite direction, taking the trail back toward Pioneer City after his most mysterious movements of the night.

Jack Harding crossed the new bridge over Canyon River, with a compliment to the quick and good work of Captain Payne who had built it, and made his way then to the place where he knew that Marsden was in hiding, awaiting a call to duty from his chief.

"I say, Harding, I hear you have gambled away several fortunes," said Mooney.

"Yes, fool that I am."

"And they tell me that you owe big gambling money now among your fellows."

"I do owe about a thousand, but I've quit fooling with cards now and am paying it off as I can; but what is my gambling and debts your business?"

"Just this: I'll square them if you will let me get away from you."

"I'll square them myself if I am given time."

"I'll do it now."

"How so?"

"Well, I've got twelve hundred dollars with me which you can have, if you'll let me give you the slip."

"Can't think of it, Mooney."

"You need only let me go, that is all, say your horse fell, and jerked the lead-line out of your hand, and I rode away in the darkness."

"You hav'n't got more than twelve hundred, have you Mooney?"

"Well yes, a few hundreds more, but I wanted that you know."

"And I want money, too, and want it bad; but you hav'n't got within a hundred thousand dollars enough to tempt me to sell out my honor and go back on my chief, Buffalo Bill."

"No, I'm not that kind of a fellow, gambler though I am and hard nut in general."

Mooney swore savagely, for he found he had mistaken his man, but he said no more and soon after they rode up to Marsden's little camp.

Jack Harding found Marsden on the alert, as he had been, for the chief of scouts had picked his men to go with him, and they were not to be caught napping.

Delivering the letters, and the prisoner,

over to Marsden, Jack Harding saw him depart for the fort with the wretched and unwilling Mooney, and then he went on down the river a few miles after Brockway who had been sent to a point where he would be readily found if needed by the chief.

He found Brockway also not one to be caught easily off guard, and the two were soon returning together toward the hut where Jack Harding had been told to wait until Toby Hart's coach came along from the fort and then go on with it to Mooney's station and join Will Palmer.

When day dawned Brockway read his instructions from Buffalo Bill and they were as follows:

"Go to Fort Rock on the Overland stage trail, and you will find my trail, marked for you."

"Follow it to a secluded camp where you can leave your horses, and returning to Fort Rock await there the coming of Lieutenant Walter Worth and his men, and then follow on after me."

"I will mark my trail for you, and leave word for the lieutenant."

Reaching the cabin where Jack Harding had been stationed, the two scouts had breakfast together, and while Brockway went on to obey his instructions from Buffalo Bill, his companion stationed himself near the stage trail, spread his blanket and lay down to get what rest he could after his night in the saddle.

He knew that the rumble of the coach-wheels would awaken him long before it came in sight.

It was shortly after noon that he awakened with a start, for the coach was coming, and the wheels had struck hard against a stone.

He arose quickly and took his stand by the trail, and soon it came in sight, Toby Hart on the box and driving briskly along.

"Ho, Toby, I've got to hold you up," he said with a laugh, and the driver drew rein.

"Seen anything wrong on the trail, Toby?"

"Nothing, Jack."

"Meet any one?"

"No, but I am sure two horsemen rode out of the trail when they saw me coming, and I confidently expected a hold-up."

"I can tell you about them, for one of them didn't want to be seen; but wait until I hitch my horse to your leaders, and I'll ride on with you to Mooney's."

The horse was soon fastened alongside the off leader, and mounting to the box Jack Harding said:

"Got some passengers inside I see?"

"Yes, three: a soldier's wife, a miner and the sutler's clerk."

"Any news of Jack Jessop's coach?"

"Not a word and there will not be, for it went down with all hands, on the Canyon River bridge."

"I don't see any other way to look at it, Toby; but the chief is out hot on the war-trail for some reason and he don't throw time and energy away."

"You bet he don't; but where is he?"

"Off somewhere, just now; but the two horsemen you saw bolt for shelter were Marsden and stock-tender Mooney, the latter a prisoner, and that is why the scout hid, for he didn't wish it to be seen by any of the passengers, that Mooney was in trouble."

"But he is, you say?"

"Oh, yes, only don't speak of it at Pioneer City; but the chief brought him in and fired him on to the fort in charge of Marsden, and sent Will Palmer on to the station to take control there, and I'm going on to join him."

"I guess something's up, only I'm in the dark now, though there'll be light enough when the chief gets ready to have it."

"You bet there is, and I'm glad he cribbed Mooney, for I know he's a bad one, and I've been suspicious of him."

Thus the two parads talked together until they reached Mooney's station, and there Will Palmer was found on duty, and with the relay of horses ready to hitch to the coach.

CHAPTER XL.

IN THE TOILS.

WHEN Will Palmer went to Mooney's station he found it deserted, and the horses fastened up in the corral.

He gave them water, hopped them and turned them out to feed, except the six fresh ones for the coach, and these he staked out near at hand.

When the coach came up, that the passengers might not know Mooney was not there, should any one be aboard who might state the fact in Pioneer City, Will Palmer several times called out to the stock-tender by name, as though he was inside the cabin.

When the fresh horses had been hitched up, and the coach rolled away, Will Palmer turned to his comrade and said:

"So far, good, Jack."

"Yes, Will, and Marsden dodged the coach with Mooney, so that he was not seen to be a prisoner."

"I guess there's trouble expected here, as the colonel selected both of us to keep the station."

"It looks that way, pard, and I guess we can meet it half way."

"You bet!" and the two scouts arranged affairs about the cabin to suit themselves.

They discussed the matter of Marsden's going on to the fort with Mooney a prisoner, that Brockway had been sent off on a mission to Fort Rock, to await for Lieutenant Walter Worth, and they had been placed at the stage station.

"I tell you, Jack, the chief is on the war-path worse than a wolf."

"He is, indeed, and he knows just what he is about, too."

"You bet he does! and that means, I think, that he intends to hit back at the Red Hands for sounding his death-knell."

"Well, I hope he will, for that was a piece of iron nerve on their part, putting out that threat against the chief."

The day passed quietly away at the station, and at night all the stock was corralled, and all made safe for the hours of darkness.

The two parads had supper, smoked their pipes, and turned in early, for they wanted to get what rest they could.

They had been asleep but a short while when the sound of hoofbeats without aroused them.

They were up in an instant, weapons in hand and silent as ghosts.

"Ho, Pard Mooney!" was called out from without.

"Well, who is it?" gruffly returned Will Palmer, imitating the surly voice of the stock-tender, and answering as though just half awake.

"It's me."

"Who's me?"

"Bat Brindley. Let me in quick, for I've got news for you, and have got to be away soon."

"All right, in one minute. Come in," and Will Palmer unbarred the door and opened it.

"Strike a light, for it is as dark as Sheol here," ordered Brindley, as he stepped across the threshold.

In an instant he was dealt a stunning blow in the head by Will Palmer, and, as he reeled Jack Harding threw his arms about him.

Bat Brindley was known as a very powerful man, but the blow half stunned him, and he had two men to deal with almost as strong as he was; so he was quickly disarmed, bound and a prisoner.

Then Will Palmer struck a light, and remarked:

"I thought you were a prisoner at the fort."

"So I was, but they found I was falsely accused, so released me."

"That is a lie, for Toby Hart told me to-day that Captain Payne had sent you on to the fort under two of his men, and you had never turned up there, nor the men either, and so it was an assured thing that you had bribed your guards and escaped."

"Well, I didn't give them all the money I had."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they were new hands with Captain Payne, late enlistments, and were glad to take a few hundreds each and skip."

"They went one way with my horse and the pursuit was doubtless put on their trail, while I dodged along the stage trail on foot, and came here expecting to find Mooney."

"Where is he?"

"At the fort, where you will soon be."

"You intend to send me back?"

"Certainly."

"You know I said I had not given the two soldiers all the money I had."

"And you have got some for us?"

"I have," eagerly said the man.

"Well, it will take a big sum to buy Jack Harding and myself."

"I've got some thousands along, for I always went ready for business."

"Well, pay Jack a hundred thousand dollars, and give me an equal sum, and you can go."

"You are fools."

"Just because we wish a big bribe? Oh no."

"If we took anything it would be big money, and as we know you can't raise the money we demand, we will be honest men and accept no bribes—see?"

Jack Harding laughed at Will Palmer's way of putting it, while Bat Brindley roundly cursed them both, for he saw that he had been captured in a very clever way, after his bribing the two newly enlisted soldiers to let him go free, and the chances were that he would get no other chance to escape.

"Well, Brindley, we'll make a bed down for you, and then we'll all turn in again."

"Better gag him, for should another visitor come he would warn him," said Harding.

"If he does I'll knife him the moment he chirps," Will Palmer said in a tone that certainly warned the prisoner to keep silent.

CHAPTER XLI.

A SUCCESSFUL CHASE.

MARSDEN went on his way to the fort with his prisoner, looking well ahead, as day dawned, for the coach, so that he could ride off the trail as it approached and not let those who might be in it see that Mooney, the stock-tender, was in trouble.

He rode off the trail just as Toby Hart caught sight of him, and then he renewed his way as before.

When he was again on his way, Mooney said to him:

"See here, Pard Marsden, you don't wish to see me hanged, do you?"

"Not unless you deserve it, Mooney."

"Well, it's just this way, you see."

"Buffalo Bill, your chief, don't like me, for—"

"He don't like any infernal rascal, Mooney, and that is what he knows you to be, or he would never have sent you a prisoner to the fort."

"That is the way you believe; but the truth is, Cody is on the wrong trail, and he thinks I'm crooked when I am not."

"If you take me to the fort, they'll jump me on his say-so, and I'll get it where the chicken got the ax."

"In the neck?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Now, I'm pretty well heeled, for I've got a wad of money with me that runs up into the hundreds, and I'll share it with you, if you just let me make my escape—see?"

"You'll see that I'll break your jaw if you dare to hint to me that I can be bribed."

"I've a notion to shoot you and go in and report that I had to do it to prevent your escaping," said the scout with indignant anger, and the foiled stock-tender became silent.

A second time had he been foiled in his attempt to bribe one of Buffalo Bill's men, and now he saw that there was no chance for him—that he must be taken to the fort.

As Marsden neared the fort with his prisoner, he drew rein suddenly, for he saw a party of horsemen ride into the trail.

A glance showed that they were soldiers, and riding on, he came up with them.

Their horses were jaded and all the party looked worn out.

It was the squad sent in pursuit of Bat Brindley and his two guards.

They had followed the trail of the three horses, riding rapidly, and had come up with the fugitives in spite of their rapid flight.

Lieutenant Walter Worth was in command of the pursuers and he was not an officer to spare men or horses in chasing down a fugitive.

He had discovered the trick played by Bat Brindley, to make his escape on foot and let the two men take his horse along, so that he would be supposed to be with them, and they, in their greed, had been glad to take the animal hoping to sell him at some of the camps for a good sum, for they supposed that they had covered up their trail well; but they did not know the persevering young officer who had gone in pursuit of him, or understand what a good borderman he was.

The result was that though the two newly enlisted soldiers and treacherous guards had been captured, Bat Brindley had not been found with them.

Soon after the party rode into the fort, and the soldiers greeted the sight of the captured prisoners with a cheer.

"Come on with me to headquarters, Marsden," said the lieutenant, and he rode up to the quarters of Colonel Carr, accompanied by the scout and the three prisoners.

"Well, Worth, you are back again, and you look as though you had had a hard time of it, though the capture of the prisoners compensates for all suffering," said Colonel Carr pleasantly as the young officer, the scout and the three prisoners entered his quarters.

"I captured three horses and two men, the soldiers, colonel, for Brindley had left them and gone on foot; but I met on the stage trail near the fort Scout Marsden, here, and this third prisoner."

"Ah! Scout Marsden captured Brindley, then?"

"No, colonel; this man is not Brindley, but Mooney the stock-tender of Station One, this side of Pioneer City, and sent to you by Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! I had never met Brindley, nor did I know the stock-tender."

"What mischief have you been up to, my man?"

"I have a letter for you, colonel, from chief of scouts Cody, and also one for you, Lieutenant Worth."

"They will doubtless explain about Mooney here, sir," said Marsden.

"All right, I'll have these prisoners cared for first," and calling his orderly the colonel ordered the prisoners sent to the guard-house and a strong guard placed over them.

Then he turned to his letter from Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SECRET LETTERS.

LIEUTENANT WALTER WORTH had glanced at the letter given him by Scout Marsden, with an apology for doing so to the colonel, and read:

"DEAR SIR:—"

"May I ask you, upon receipt of this, and subject to the approval of Colonel Carr, to whom I also write, to come with your picked squad of men to Fort Rock, where one of my scouts will be on hand to meet you."

"He has his instructions and will lead you on after me, my trail being marked so as to be readily followed."

"In my letter to Colonel Carr I have stated the result of my trail thus far."

"Once having struck my trail there will be no need of great haste, as I only wish to know that I have you within easy call, and I will leave written reports on the way."

"With respect,

"W. F. Cody,

"Chief of Scouts."

Such was the lieutenant's letter, and having read it he handed it over to the colonel, who said:

"Now, Scout Marsden, what have you to report?"

Marsden told of Jack Harding's coming by night to his hiding-place for him, bringing the letters and the prisoner, and the orders given him from Buffalo Bill.

He also made known that the prisoner, Mooney, was so anxious to escape, that he had offered to bribe him to allow him to do so.

Having heard the scout's report, and dismissed him, the colonel opened Buffalo Bill's letter, after having glanced over the one handed to him by Lieutenant Worth, and found it as follows:

"ON THE TRAIL. Night.

"COLONEL CARR:—"

"DEAR SIR:—I write this from the hut in

the pines beyond Canyon River, and send it to you by the hands of two of my scouts.

"I placed my four scouts where I could get at them in case of need, and went on my trail alone down the river."

"I found nearly every piece of the wrecked bridge, but no dead bodies, horses, or pieces of the coach or baggage, for the reason that the stage did not go down into Canyon River."

"I have proof of what I say, but can say no more now, only to request that you give no hint of this to any one, save Lieutenant Worth and Sergeant Fallon, to both of whom I have written."

"Continuing my trailing, I camped near a spot where there had recently been a camp, and while there at night, scouted around and found that there were foes on my track."

"I went on my way that night, found a good spot and ambushed them."

"They were Injun Nick and two comrades from Pioneer City who sought to rescue Bat Brindley from me, believing that I had taken him far off the stage trail to dodge them."

"Injun Nick escaped, but I buried the other two, and pushed on along the trail I had been following."

"Going to Mooney, the stock-tender's—Station One on the fort stage trail—I made him a prisoner, not only from my own suspicions of his treachery but from the dying confession of one of the men with Injun Nick, proving that I was right, and I send him to you under the charge of being secretly an ally of the Red Hands."

"I will continue on my trail from the camp, which crosses the Overland, and mark it for Lieutenant Worth to follow, with your permission."

"May I also ask that Sergeant Fallon be allowed to come along with Lieutenant Worth, and that the expedition be fitted out with extra horses and fully a month's supplies, and I believe I can pledge you good results."

"I have placed two of my men at Mooney's station, and they have their orders what to do when relieved from there by another stock-tender sent out by Agent Burk at Pioneer City."

"With respect,

"I remain,

"W. F. Cody,

"Chief of Scouts, Fort Advance."

The colonel having read this letter carefully through, went over it again aloud, to Lieutenant Worth, and said:

"Well, I am convinced of one thing, that the right man is trailing this mystery to a solution."

"Yes, sir, there is no doubt of it."

"Now we must keep his suspicion about the coach a dead secret, Worth."

"In fact, sir, his assertion that it did not go down with the bridge, rather than his suspicion."

"Yes, he plainly says that the coach did not go down with the bridge, and his wishing Sergeant Fallon to go with you, is proof that he has, or expects, good news for him."

"It would seem so, sir."

"Now when will you be ready to start, Worth?"

"At once, sir, for you know I did not take any of my picked men after those fugitives."

"No, but you took yourself, and you are used up; but I guess to-morrow will be time enough to start, so you will have a night's rest."

"Delay might spoil all, Colonel Carr, so I am ready to go within an hour, and can rest on the trail."

"All right, and take Sergeant Fallon with you, and also several scouts to send back in case you need aid."

The lieutenant saluted and went to his quarters, and there found Sergeant Fallon awaiting him.

"The very man I wanted to see, sergeant."

"Yes, sir, and I received a letter from Buffalo Bill, by Scout Marsden, telling me to come with you and join him, and that there is hope for me that I will not find matters as bad as I had believed."

"That is cheering news, sergeant, and I grant that it may be so, and, as Buffalo Bill says so there is every hope that it is."

"Yes, sir, but he tells me I am not to speak of it to any one but you."

"Yes, and I have orders from the colonel to take you with me."

"Thank God for that, sir."

"And I start within an hour, sergeant."

"I will be ready, sir."

"And prepared for a month's stay."

The sergeant left the lieutenant's quarters with a glad look upon his face, for his faith was all placed in Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT FORT ROCK.

THE troop to go with Lieutenant Worth was formed of picked men and horses.

Extra animals had been ordered taken along and pack horses carried a complete camp outfit and ample supplies.

A horse-shoer was one of the party, and an extra man as cook for the men, while Lieutenant Worth carried his own faithful negro servant and man-of-all-work.

Besides Sergeant Fallon there was a sergeant, corporal and sixteen men, so that the party all told with the four scouts numbered twenty-seven, and thoroughly armed and equipped they need have no fear of any outlaw band that could be brought against them, while they could stand off ten to one their force of Indians.

Then, too, they were to be joined by Brockway the scout at Fort Rock, a huge pile of stone on the trail which had the appearance of a fortress, and further still they were to follow on the trail of Buffalo Bill and he by himself was a tower of strength.

The command, so rumor went in the fort, was sent to patrol the stage trail for a couple of hundred miles, and try to protect the coaches running beyond Pioneer City from the road-agents, as well as those on the branch to Fort Advance.

Sergeant Fallon had been sent along, it was whispered, to take his thoughts off his great grief by active duty in the field.

When they rode away from Fort Advance Lieutenant Worth called Sergeant Fallon to ride up alongside of him and said in his free-and-easy way:

"Sergeant, with the consent of Colonel Carr, you are to serve on this expedition as my aide, for I will need your services as such, and you will be obeyed accordingly."

Sergeant Fallon saluted and said earnestly:

"You are very kind to me, lieutenant, and I appreciate all that you have done and are doing for me, sir."

"I will endeavor to retain your good will, sir."

"You will do that I am sure."

"But now let me ask you just how you understand Cody's letter?"

"That he has made some important discovery, sir, which leads him to bid me hope that my child is not dead."

"Just so, and the colonel told me that I might say to you that in Buffalo Bill's letter to him, he said that he had convincing proof that the coach had not gone down the chasm with the bridge."

"I felt, sir, that Buffalo Bill had some such thought all along."

"It was a slip of the tongue, maybe, that he made, and yet what he said bade me hope as much as though he had told me to do so."

"When a man such as he is has a doubt in his mind it is surely based upon a firm foundation, and he at once went out to strengthen his suspicion I am sure."

"That is what he did do, and he has not rested in the work."

"Now, we are going to join him, or rather to follow on his trail, for Scout Brockway is to meet us at Fort Rock, and guide us according to his orders from Cody."

"But that was a clever capture he made of Stock-Tender Mooney, sergeant."

"It was indeed, sir, and of the man Brindley as well."

"Yes, the Red Hands threatened to kill Cody, or drive him off the frontier, and he is turning the tables on them in great shape, granting of course that those two men are secret members of the outlaw band."

"He is indeed, sir; but from what Driver Toby Hart told me, for I had a talk with him, I fear that there is a very dangerous man on Scout Cody's track."

"Who is that?"

"Injun Nick, sir."

"I have heard of him, and he is the man who started in to rescue Brindley."

"Yes, sir, and failing to find him in the coach, went off on Buffalo Bill's trail."

"Well, from the letters sent in by Buffalo Bill he seems to be all right; but it is a great pity that Brindley got away, for he will be another bloodhound on Cody's track."

"Yes, sir."

The pace set by Lieutenant Worth was a brisk one, though not fast enough to distress the horses.

The young officer was anxious to reach Fort Rock, and meet Brockway, so as to learn just where Buffalo Bill was and what he had to do.

By getting there before nightfall he would know, without having to camp and await until the next day, as he would not care to risk finding the scout in the darkness.

The sun was yet an hour high when the rocky pile came in sight on the right of the stage-trail.

They had passed Monument Hill, the bridge and numerous other points where the road-agents had held up the coaches, several of them dotted with graves that went to prove how merciless the Red Hands had been in their search after the gold of other people.

As they neared the fort-like pile of stone a form advanced from its shadow out into the trail.

"It is Brockway the scout, sir," said Sergeant Fallon, and as the lieutenant rode up the scout saluted and said:

"I am here, sir, by Chief Cody's orders, to guide you on your trail, Lieutenant Worth."

"All right, Brockway, we are one and all of us most willing."

"Where is Cody?"

"I have not seen him, sir, only received written orders through Scout Marsden, and came here."

"You do not know where he is then?"

"Gone to the northward, sir, for I went according to orders, struck his trail, and returned to await your coming, sir."

"Will you go to the place where he camped, sir, and where my horse now is, for the night, for grass is plenty there and water too?"

"Then there is no hurry to come up with him?"

"On the contrary, sir, he wished us to come along slowly and give him time to act."

"All right, lead the way to camp— Ah! there comes some one," and as the lieutenant spoke, around a bend in the trail dashed two horsemen at a gallop, but seeing the soldiers they came to a sudden halt.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO HORSEMEN.

THE two horsemen that had come so suddenly around a bend in the trail, had drawn rein in a way that at first showed fear of the group of soldiers.

But an instant after as though reassured, they came forward at a gallop once more, and Brockway the scout called out:

"It's Jack Harding, sir, and a prisoner!"

"You are right, the man with him is tied to his saddle," answered Lieutenant Worth, and coming up Jack Harding saluted the officer and came to a halt.

Then it was seen that the one with him had his hands bound behind his back, and his feet securely fastened together beneath his horse.

The two animals were also side by side, the bridle-rein of the prisoner's horse being wrapped close around the horn of the scout's saddle.

"You gave me a scare, Lieutenant Worth, for in the shadow of the rocks as you are, I thought you were road-agents," said Jack Harding.

"Not so bad as that, Jack, but willing to keep company just now with any road-agents we may find."

"But who have you there?"

"Bat Brindley, sir."

"Ah! the very man Colonel Carr wants."

"Where did you catch him?"

"He came to Mooney, at the stock-tender's station, last night, sir, and wanted to be taken in and we obliged him."

"He wished to surrender?"

"Oh, no, sir, only to have Mooney, his pard, take him in, and he found the stock tender gone and Will Palmer and I keeping house."

"It is a valuable capture, Harding, that you have made, for he escaped, you know, by bribing the men sent by Captain Payne to guard him to the fort."

"He told us at first, lieutenant, that the colonel found he had been falsely accused by Buffalo Bill, so let him go, but afterward he said that he had bribed the men, and wanted to bribe us, too."

"But could not?"

"He didn't have our price, sir, for we wanted a hundred thousand dollars each," answered Jack Harding, solemnly.

"You come high, Jack," and Lieutenant Worth smiled.

"Too high for any but a millionaire to buy, sir," was the scout's response.

"And now what are you going to do with your prisoner?"

"I had started for the fort with him, sir, to make a night-ride of it, for fear that in daylight I might run upon some of his gang who wants him more than I do."

"Do you think you can make it alone with him?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I'll go through, I guess."

"Well, report to Colonel Carr that you met us at Rock Fort, and that I found the scout Brockway here."

"Yes, sir," and with a salute Jack Harding rode on with his prisoner, whose face wore a scowl full of hatred, seemingly of mankind in general.

The lieutenant then told Brockway to lead the way to the camp, and the party had soon reached the spot, a fertile, narrow little valley, through which ran a brook of the finest water.

It was so located that two guards could keep the horses concealed in the valley, and also do the sentinel duty, while wood was plentiful and several camp-fires were soon casting their cheerful light on the scene.

Sergeant Fallon, in his honorary rank as aide, was invited to mess with Lieutenant Worth, and the negro servant of the officer, who bore the Irish name of Mike, soon had a tempting supper for them.

It was early still when the camp-fires were allowed to die down, the sentinels were placed, and the camp sunk into deep repose for the night.

In the morning the camp was astir early and the sun was not far above the horizon when Brockway rode to the front and soon after came upon the well-marked trail left by Buffalo Bill.

The scout led on for an hour or more, passing the spot which had been as far as he had gone on it alone, and was then seen to come to a sudden halt.

What it meant Lieutenant Worth discovered as he rode up and beheld not only the chief of scouts' trail, but that he had turned into one that had not been made by less than a score of horses.

The scout's trail was comparatively fresh, that of the large party he was trailing days old, yet it could be seen that it had been made shortly after the storm when the earth was softened by the rain.

"I told you so, sir; Buffalo Bill followed this trail from beyond the coach-trail, and pursues it with a sure knowledge that the other end will solve the mystery of the lost stage," whispered Sergeant Fallon.

"Yes, and the sign of the trail convinced him that he would need help, so he sent for us."

"How far ahead do you think the chief is, Brockway?"

"All of twenty-four hours, sir, perhaps a little more."

"All right, we are on his trail now, and he surely is tracking the Red Hands, for who else can he be following?"

"Push on once more, Brockway."

The scout again rode to the front, and close behind came the lieutenant and his men, all now feeling that they had something tangible to cling to in the two trails they were following, lead where they might.

CHAPTER XLV.

FRIDAY AT "STATION ONE."

"COLONEL" BUCK, stage agent, landlord and general speculator of Pioneer City, had

been let into the secret by Toby Hart that Mooney was a traitor, and asked to send another stock-tender out to Station One.

But he had been told also that two of Buffalo Bill's scouts were there in charge at the stock and cabin, and not to send the new man until Saturday morning, as they had an engagement for Friday they were most anxious to keep in their own way.

The truth was that Buffalo Bill had made known to Will Palmer the report of the dying outlaw, that upon three days of the week the Red Hands sent a messenger, or courier, to the rendezvous to meet their spies, and the scout had been ordered to take in the man who came to Station One on the following Friday, for he was sure to be one of the outlaw band.

That the spies were not even allowed to know the retreats of the Red Hands, showed how well they guarded their secret and prepared for their safety.

Only the Riders knowing, they could not readily be betrayed.

But who were the "Riders" was the question Buffalo Bill was determined to solve.

Mooney the stock-tender was an ally, but not a Rider, and Injun Nick was a spy, but not one of the raiding band.

That Bat Brindley was one of the road agents proper Buffalo Bill firmly believed; but spies, allies or whatever they might be, all were guilty of outlawry and must be hunted down.

With Mooney and Bat Brindley prisoners, and Leonard Lorne and Dandy dead, the work of Buffalo Bill had been by no means bad thus far, for Station One was held by his scouts, Lieutenant Worth and his men were within call, three days were known and the rendezvous where the couriers of the Red Riders were to appear to give orders or receive information, the chief of scout himself was on the trail of the band, he had discovered that the coach had not gone down with the Canyon River bridge, and Injun Nick, be he Rider or spy, was a fugitive.

The chief of scouts had begun well in his hunt for those who were hunting him, and he was spreading his nets surely though slowly to catch the Red Riders.

Jack Harding having gone on to the fort with Bat Brindley as his prisoner, Will Palmer—or Dashing Billy as his scout comrades called the handsome young man—was left alone at the cabin of Station One, and the following day would be Friday.

But that did not disturb Dashing Billy in the slightest degree.

He was a brave fellow, had, many times before been forced to rely wholly upon himself in times of danger, and would do so now.

He was anxious to get Bat Brindley safe into the fort, for fear a party of Red Hands might come there and find him a prisoner.

When therefore Jack Harding departed with the prisoner, Will Palmer got ready to meet what came in the way of friend or foe.

He dressed in a natty way, and was often called the "Buckskin Dude" from his neat and fancy attire, so it went hard with him to put on Mooney's old slouch hat and worn buckskin coat, rough boots and appear to be the stock-tender himself.

He was just the size of Mooney, and like the stock-tender wore no beard, his face being clean shaven, so that he really did look, without a critical examination, very much like the man he intended to impersonate.

That was just what he wanted, for in that he got the advantage over a foe.

The night after Jack Harding and his prisoner left, passed without any interruption to the scout on watch.

He turned his horses out in the morning, got his breakfast and then sat around awaiting the coming of the Red Hand courier whom from what Buffalo Bill had told him he confidently expected.

He had weapons scattered here and there within easy reach, besides those he wore in his belt.

He was just preparing dinner when he heard the clatter of hoofs, and at once he was all attention.

A moment after up dashed a horseman, and as he drew rein he called out:

"I say, Mooney, I hopes you has grub ready, for I has got ter git, as I run upon a

big trail a-followin' our own up to the northward, and they is soldiers too.

"Any news for ther chief?"

"Yes, come in, and I'll show yer."

Will Palmer had stood back in the shadow of the cabin and while the horseman was speaking took him in from head to foot.

He was well mounted, well equipped, armed thoroughly and wore a miner's garb, of slouch hat, woolen shirt, corduroy pants and a scarf about his neck.

He threw himself from his horse as the scout spoke, dropped the reins on the ground and stepped into the cabin.

The wooden blinds were closed and the light that came in was through the open door, so Jack Harding was back in the shadow, his enemy in the full glare of the sunlight.

That he was the Red Hands courier his own words had betrayed, and as he stepped into the cabin he said:

"I've got to ride for it, head those soldiers off and report to the chief that they are on our trail."

"Hands up, first!"

The man was taken completely by surprise.

He saw a cocked revolver pointed full in his face.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CORRALLING THE COURIER.

WHATEVER courage the Red Hands courier might possess, he had not sufficient to disobey the calmly uttered command of Will Palmer.

He promptly raised his hands above his head, turned deadly pale and gasped forth:

"You are not Mooney?"

"No, but he is as safe as you are, so don't worry about him."

"Turn your back to me, and the attempt to lower your hands means sudden death to you."

The man obeyed, turning promptly around.

With the revolver muzzle now pressed hard with one hand against the back bone of the fellow, Will Palmer with his other hand unbuckled his belt of arms and then felt over him for any concealed weapon he might have.

He had none, and throwing the noose of a lariat over his upraised hands, Will Palmer drew them hard down to his side and had him securely bound within a minute of time.

"Who is you?" said the man, giving a sigh of relief when the scout's revolver no longer covered him.

"I am one of Buffalo Bill's scouts, and my name is William B. Palmer, late of the Texas Rangers, and called by my pards Dashing Billy."

"Want any further information?"

"No, I knows too blamed much now, if you is one o' Buffalo Bill's men."

"I am, and it was through him that I am so lucky as to corral you."

"What does yer want with me?"

"I guess the colonel will hang you."

"Lordy, what fer?"

"Well, as a Red Hand Rider, I reckon."

"You is a fool, for I hain't an outlaw, but an honest man."

"Your looks belie you then, if you are honest, for your face is a painted sign reading: 'Villain from 'Wayback,' and besides your own words made you out a pard of Mooney."

"I knows him."

"Yes, and came here as a Red Hand courier to learn what information he had of the booty the coaches were to carry, and, I suppose, leave orders for your spy also."

"But Buffalo Bill got onto your little game, and I tell you that your whole gang will be corralled, for he is hunting you worse than a wolf."

The man became a shade whiter, and Will Palmer continued:

"Now I will get dinner, and you are my guest, for you said you were hungry."

"What may I call you, pard?"

"My name is Jack Rayburt."

"Jack Rabbit, is it?"

"Well, Jack, you'll have to be my guest until to-morrow, when I will start with you to the fort."

"They'll hang me."

"I don't doubt it."

"Though I hain't done nothin'."

"That is the melody they all sing; but, you'll have to prove your innocence to the colonel, after I tell him just what you said."

Will Palmer then got dinner, and fond of good living himself, and having a guest to dine with him, he got the best the larder afforded.

First binding the feet of his prisoner, and making him fast to a log of the cabin, he then released his hands and drew the table up to where he could eat from it.

Then he helped him bountifully and the two ate together as though they were the best of friends.

Having secured his prisoner's hands once more, Will Palmer went out and led his horse to the corral, after which he returned to patiently wait for the morrow, when he would be relieved from duty by a stock-tender whom the agent would send out from Pioneer City according to instructions.

The young scout was much pleased with his clever capture of the outlaw courier, and muttered to himself:

"If we can only bag those that visit the bridge and Monument Hill on Sunday and Wednesday, we will be in great luck."

"I must not let this stock-tender, who is coming to-morrow, know about my prisoner, for I am not sure I can trust him, so I'll get him out of sight early in the morning."

The night wore tediously away to the Scout Palmer, for he was awake most of the time, every movement of his prisoner putting him on the *qui vive* for fear he might in some way have released his hands.

Just at dawn Will Palmer came and soon had his prisoner's horse saddled and bridled.

Then he got breakfast, and when they had eaten it, he made Jack Rayburt, as he had called himself, mount and led his horse up the trail for a quarter of a mile, when he turned into a secure hiding-place among the rocks.

Making his prisoner dismount, he said:

"I don't like to be cruel, Jack Rabbit; but I've got to prevent your escape, or singing a tune should any one pass by, so you will have to be gagged as well as bound hands and feet, and I'll muzzle your horse also, so he will not neigh if any one goes along the trail."

"I'll swear to yer I won't call out if yer don't muzzle me."

"Oaths don't go in this court, pard."

"It must be done," and Will Palmer bound his prisoner securely, then, after a hard struggle, pushed the gag, he had made for him, into his mouth.

A sack was then drawn over the head of the outlaw's horse, and, leaving them, he hastened back to the cabin, arriving there just as a buck board drove up, and in it he saw Colonel Buck and another man.

"Ho, Palmer, glad to see you; but I guess you prefer scouting to stock-tending."

"Yes, colonel, I do; but as Mooney was called to the fort, I took his place."

"All right, I have a man here now to relieve you, and I guess he is not of the Mooney stripe."

"I hope not, sincerely."

"It was a trump card Buffalo Bill played for me in finding out what Mooney was; but do you know if he has seen or heard of Injun Nick and two pards that went with him to rescue Bat Brindley?"

"Hav'n't heard, colonel."

"And Brindley got away, Toby Hart told me."

"Yes, but was caught again; but now I must be off, for I'm wanted badly, and was only waiting the coming of another stock-tender."

"I'll show you round, pard," and having made the new man acquainted with his surroundings, and held a few minutes' conversation with the colonel aside, Will Palmer mounted his horse and went off at a gallop along the trail, for he had other orders of Buffalo Bill to execute.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SCOUTS IN AMBUSH.

"JACK RABBIT," as Will Palmer called his prisoner, was found just as he had left him, and freed of his gag and bonds, he was ordered to mount his horse.

The man showed an ugly spirit, and the scout was forced to tell him that he would have to obey promptly, or he would gag him again, and tie him hands and feet to his horse.

He then sullenly mounted his horse and his feet were secured beneath the animal, and one hand tied to the horn of the saddle.

Then Will Palmer started out at a brisk pace on the trail to the fort.

He halted at the center stage-station, or Number Two, to change horses, the two men there seeming surprised to see a prisoner, and were yet not told who he was, or was supposed to be.

Riding on at the same rapid pace Will Palmer reached the pines in which stood the little cabin, and there found Jack Harding awaiting him.

"Well, Billy, you got him all right?" called out Jack Harding.

"You bet I did, and he's as ugly as a bag full of cats."

"He looks it, and I don't remember to have seen him before."

"Nor do I, but he's a self-confessed Red Hand."

"It's a lie, I hain't."

"I never argue with a dying man," said Will Palmer, quietly, and turning to his companion he asked:

"Did you get in all right with your man, Bat Brindley, Jack?"

Both scouts were gazing at the prisoner as the question was asked, and they saw him start at the name of Bat Brindley and turn a shade paler.

"Oh, yes, and delivered him over to the colonel, who seemed pleased greatly and said Buffalo Bill and his Buckskin Boys were worth a regiment of soldiers any day."

"Good! I like to hear the chief praised; but now let us eat a mouthful and then push on to the fort, for I'm anxious to get in by night as you know to-morrow will be Sunday and we have got to be at Monument Hill."

"I'll go on there now, so as to be in plenty of time, Will, and you come back and join me there."

"All right, Jack," and the two scouts soon had dinner ready and ate it in haste, the prisoner appearing to have lost his appetite, for it looked to him now as though his capture was not an accidental happening.

Having mounted once more, Will Palmer and his prisoner started off again in a gallop, leaving Jack Harding to go on to Monument Hill and go into hiding for another Red Hand courier on the next day, as one was due there at that time.

The same pace was kept up to the new bridge, and then on to Station Three, where the horses were again changed, and Will Palmer and his prisoner pushed on toward the fort.

It was just sunset when Dashing Billy and his prisoner rode up to the stockade gate, and the officer of the day conducted them at once to headquarters.

"I have another prisoner for you, colonel, having captured him, according to instructions from Chief Cody, at Station One yesterday, and he's a bad one to handle, sir."

"You deserve great credit, Scout Palmer, especially if you made the capture alone?"

"I was alone, sir, but the credit is due to Chief Buffalo Bill, sir, for he put me onto him."

"Yes, and he shall have the credit he deserves, though you are as modest as he is, Palmer, in never taking credit to yourself."

"You are pretty sure this man is a Red Hand?"

"No he hain't, for I is not a outlaw, but an honest man," said the prisoner.

"Well, sir, the chief's instructions were to remain at Station One over Friday and lay for a Red Hand courier who would put in an appearance for orders, and to give instructions."

"Jack Harding came in with his man, for fear of a rescue, so I rigged up in Mooney's togs and looked as much like him as a twin brother."

"Up came this man, took me for Mooney, and I've written down here, sir, just what he said," and Will Palmer handed over a slip of paper to the colonel, who, glancing at it said:

"He has condemned himself surely," and he ordered the officer of the day to take

charge of the prisoner, and turning to Will Palmer, said:

"We have Mooney, Brindley, and your man prisoners now, Scout Palmer, and prospects are brightening for the running down of this band of Red Hands, for Chief Cody will never leave the trail until he sees the end of it."

"No, sir, that's his way; but maybe Jack Harding and I can fetch in a couple or more of them by Wednesday night, sir."

"How so?"

"The man I first brought in, sir, is the Friday courier to Station One, and there is a Sunday man for Monument Hill and a Wednesday courier for the River Canyon bridge, and Jack and I are to lay for them, sir."

"Do you not need more help?"

"No, sir, for I guess they all know Mooney, and I'll rig out in his togs, as I did before, and get the drop on them."

"All right, you know best for you have been trained in a splendid school under the king of bordermen, Buffalo Bill, so I leave it to you, Scout Palmer."

"Thank you, sir, and I'll start back to-night."

"You have heard nothing more from your chief?"

"Not since he sent me to the station, sir; but he's looking for the head imp of the gang, you may be certain, sir."

With this, and a wish from the colonel for his success, Will Palmer went to the scouts' quarters to get supper and get a short rest before starting back on his ride.

He was just two hours in the fort and then went away like a rocket on his back run to join his pard Jack Harding.

He had arranged with the stock-tender at Station Three to have his horse ready for him, and he quickly made the change and rode on.

It was a couple of hours after midnight when he rode into the little canyon near Monument Hill, where he had arranged to join Jack Harding.

The latter was on hand to greet him, and having staked his horse out the tired rider was soon fast asleep, for he had hardly closed his eyes the night before and the strain upon him had been severe with the capture and guarding of his prisoner.

Jack Harding called him just at daybreak and had breakfast ready, for he said:

"You seemed played out, Dashing Billy, so I let you sleep to the last minute."

"Thanks, pard; but I feel like a new man now, and I will soon be ready for what comes our way."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SUNDAY AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE two scouts in ambush decided that it would be as well to let Will Palmer, in Mooney's rig, be in sight at Monument Hill, for certainly, going as the members of the band did three times each week to the rendezvous, all of the Red Hands must know the stock-tender.

Seeing him as he would think at Monument Hill as he came up, the outlaw courier would be thrown off his guard by the clever impersonation of Mooney by the scout.

So Will Palmer took his place not far from the monument, and began to whistle sticks, while Jack Harding lay in ambush on the only trail leading up to and from the monument.

The stage trail ran near the cross and the graves, and by this the courier would have to approach.

Once he had passed Jack Harding lying in ambush, his fate was sure, should he even kill Will Palmer and attempt to escape.

The day was a beautiful one, just such a Sunday as makes one feel that it is indeed a day of rest.

The birds were singing above the graves of the dead, one being perched upon the cross, and a calmness rested upon the scene that could not but impress the two scouts waiting to break the spell perhaps with a tragedy, perhaps for one or both of them, to have their own lives snuffed out within a short while, for what if a number of the Red Hands should happen along that day?

The time passed slowly away and noon came.

Then there was heard the clatter of

The two scouts nerved themselves for their work.

Will Palmer was calm and ready to face the ordeal, be it even death to him.

Jack Harding was on the alert to protect his friend's life and, should he not be able to do so, to avenge him.

Up the trail came a horseman, mounted on a large horse and himself a large, heavily bearded man.

His quick glance saw the form of the pretended stock-tender, and he called out as he came on:

"Ho, Mooney, old boy, are you the courier to-day?"

"Yes, pard; but did you strike a big trail crossing the stage road?"

"You bet I did, and it means trouble, so I must get back and warn the chief with all haste, for things are going wrong I fear, as Rayburt, who went to your station on Friday hasn't turned up yet."

"Do you know what is the cause?"

The man had dismounted as he was talking, and hitching his horse now turned to Will Palmer, to suddenly discover that the latter had him covered, and heard these words:

"I want you, pard!"

"What! you a traitor, Mooney? By Heaven! it is not Mooney, and—"

He had drawn his revolvers, one in each hand, in defiance of the weapon of the scout covering him, and a bullet from Will Palmer checked his words, for now it was to be a battle to the death.

The shot of the scout shattered the right arm of the outlaw, but nothing daunted he pulled on Palmer with his left and the bullet caused a slight flesh wound in the shoulder.

Then again Will Palmer fired, and the outlaw dropped to his knees and answered the shot of his foe.

Seeing that there was nothing for it but to kill the man, though they were anxious to take him prisoner, Jack Harding sprung from his ambush, threw his rifle to his shoulder and pulled trigger.

The bullet tore through the outlaw's brain just as two more shots passed between Palmer and himself, each one drawing blood.

"Pard, are you hurt badly?" cried Jack Harding, drawing up to the spot as he saw the outlaw fall dead and his comrade stagger back.

"No, but that last bullet flattened out on my belt buckle and was well intended."

"It felt as though a mule had kicked me."

"But there is blood here," and Harding laid his hand on Will Palmer's shoulder.

"Only a flesh wound that amounts to nothing—let me see, I fired three shots and broke his arm, put a bullet in his shoulder and another in his body, but your shot did the work, Pard Jack."

"I couldn't fire sooner, as he was between you and me; but, he was game."

"To the backbone, for he stood up and took his medicine like a man; but, I am sorry we had to kill him."

"Yes, he should have stretched rope; but we got the game, so will have to bury him and then report to the colonel."

"And be ready for Wednesday at the bridge."

"Yes, if another of the gang comes, for this makes two of the couriers who will fail to report, and each one of them got on to Lieutenant Worth's trail too, so they may be a few chips shy about coming."

"But we'll be there to obey Buffalo Bill's contract and do our duty," assured Will Palmer.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

THE body of the dead outlaw was searched and buried on the hill, adding another grave to the little trail side cemetery.

As Will Palmer felt that he should have his wound properly cared for by the surgeon at the fort, he started on his way to report to Colonel Carr the result of the meeting at Monument Hill, carrying the horse and trappings of the outlaw courier with him.

He arrived in the night, but as he was informed that Colonel Carr had not yet re-

tired he at once reported to him before going to the surgeon.

"Well, Palmer, glad to see you back again; but you look pale and haggard."

"He nipped me, sir, in the shoulder, but it is only slight and the surgeon will soon fix me up all right," answered the scout and then we went on to tell the story of the fight with the outlaw courier.

Colonel Carr turned to a tablet near and jotted down some notes, while he said with a smile:

"One by one the roses fall, so to speak, Scout Palmer; but I congratulate you upon your good fortune in escaping death."

"It was Jack Harding who saved me, sir, for the duel was getting hot and deadly when my pard chipped in and brought the outlaw down with a bullet in his brain."

"He was plucky, that outlaw was, colonel, for I had him covered before he drew and he didn't scare a little bit and when we began to play our guns he advanced steadily upon me, though I broke his right arm with my first shot and clipped him twice after."

"It was a mighty pretty duel, Jack says, and I guess to a looker-on it was."

"Well, you were lucky to escape, and, with the man who was with Brindley in ambush and fired on Buffalo Bill, and the two your chief got down the river, this man you brought down makes four killed thus far, and three prisoners."

"Yes, Buffalo Bill has struck the right trail to exterminate the band, and he has got the right men to aid him in the work."

"But now go at once to the surgeon, and as your next appointment is for Wednesday, you can have a couple of days' rest at least, if you are determined not to send some one else in your place."

"No, sir, the chief left the work for me to do, with Jack Harding's aid, so I would like to be able to tell him we kept every appointment and bagged our game."

"All right, and Harding being on the watch along the trail, you can take it easy for a couple of days," and the colonel dismissed the scout who hastened to the surgeon's quarters.

It was found that the bullet had cut into his shoulder an inch deep and passed out, and after having the wound properly dressed the scout felt much better and was soon fast asleep.

The next day the surgeon twice dressed his wound, and as it no longer pained him, Will Palmer concluded not to await until Tuesday night, but to slip off at once and join his comrade, who was waiting at the cabin in the pines near Canyon River bridge.

Supplied with lint and salve for dressing the wound, and a fresh supply of provisions, Will Palmer left the fort after dark and pushed on through to the cabin in the pines that night.

Jack Harding slept lightly, heard his approach and was ready to receive a foe or friend as the case might be.

The next day Will Palmer took it quietly, Jack dressing his wound, and once more attired in Mooney's clothes and make-up, he was ready early Wednesday morning to meet the third outlaw courier should he put in an appearance.

The spot which Buffalo Bill had said was the meeting-place, was a canyon in the cliff nearest the bridge, and about a quarter of a mile away from the river.

There were scrub pines growing about the entrance to the canyon, which only penetrated the cliff a hundred rods or so, and thus the one in waiting had every chance in his favor against an enemy.

Jack Harding concealed himself in a thicket near the mouth of the little canyon, and could see every one approaching it.

Once the courier entered the canyon, Jack intended to make a run for it, and close in behind him, so as to be on hand to aid his friend.

They had barely gotten into position when Jack Harding gave a whistle of warning, as he saw a horseman coming down the trail.

The man came slowly and evidently with great caution, for he was gazing ahead and upon either side of him as he rode along.

He halted in the trail and calmly surveyed the entrance to the canyon.

Then he approached it slowly, and ready

to run for it if there was any indication of danger.

"Something has frightened him, that is certain."

"I guess it's the fact that the Friday and Sunday couriers have not put in an appearance," said Jack Harding to himself.

At last the horseman reached the mouth of the canyon and halted.

Then he hailed:

"Ho, pard, are you there?"

"I'm here, pard," came the answer of Will Palmer, and he advanced toward the horseman.

But the latter had keen eyes, and knowing Mooney well, while he had a good chance to observe the scout thoroughly as he came toward him, he called out:

"That card don't win!"

"You hain't the man you pretends to be."

Both had drawn their weapons together, and the last words of the horseman were drowned in the rattle of revolvers.

Down went the horse of the outlaw under Will Palmer's fire, but the rider caught on his feet and sprang to cover behind a rock just as Jack Harding dashed into view.

He was running into the canyon, not seeing the outlaw's place of refuge, or hearing Dashing Billy Palmer's cry of warning, when a shot brought him to his knees.

The plucky scout turned toward his foe and fired at the head peering over the bowlder, when a second time he felt a bullet cut its way through his flesh, and he fell forward upon his face, just as Will Palmer showed that he deserved the title of Dashing Billy, by running up to close quarters with his foe, who now turned again upon him.

But the outlaw's aim was bad, while Will Palmer's nerve was steadied by the fall of his comrade, and he brought down the man with a shot between the eyes.

CHAPTER L.

A DEBT REPAID.

BUFFALO BILL having set the trap for his scouts to spring upon the outlaw couriers, went on his way once more with no dread of their failing in their duty.

He always picked his men, and he was assured of the fact that there was not a scout in his command who would not stand and die by his side if need be.

So, knowing that Marsden would take Mooney on to the fort, Brockway would come on after him and bring the soldiers on his trail, while Jack Harding and Will Palmer would take care of the Red Hands' couriers, he went on his way with a feeling that he could devote his whole time and thought to the duty he had to accomplish.

The trail he had seen leading away from the camp down the river, where he had found proof that the coach had been burned, he was now following to the northward.

It led up into the Indian country, or dangerously near it the scout well knew, but that did not deter him from his intention to see the end of it.

It was a larger trail than he had ever known the band of Red Hands to leave before, but that he could account for by their having along the six stage horses, and perhaps some extra animals, for the riders were known to be only about a dozen in number.

As large as the force was, if every horse had a rider, the scout soon saw that every effort had been made to avoid meeting with any one, and to cover up their tracks.

"This trail leads, as did the one of Bat Brindley which I followed, up to the country where I saw that strange woman," mused the chief of scouts as he went along.

"I must not forget my pledge, in fact I will keep it; but then that shall not prevent me from trailing outlaws, so long as I do not track them to her home."

The scout had just found a camp, the first night after his leaving the stage trail, and had staked his horse out on a grass plot near a stream when he suddenly saw a man dash into view, dodge down behind a rock and remain there.

That he was in ambush the scout knew.

But was it for game or a human being?

He could not see the face of the man, but, from his position, for he had also dodged into cover, he could have easily brought him down with his rifle.

Patiently the scout waited to see the result of the man's lying in ambush, and whose sudden appearance had been so unexpected to him there where he had not expected to see any one.

Buffalo Bill had not long to wait, for he saw by the actions of the one in ambush that his game was approaching.

He could kill the man, yet, as he could not see his face, he might be firing upon a friend, perhaps one of his own scouts.

Still, if not a friend, might he not be saving one from the shot from ambush.

The scout was in a most painful quandary and did not know what to do.

Seeing that the man crouching behind the rock was so taken up with his own work that he would not be looking behind him, Buffalo Bill crept nearer and nearer, at last darting behind a tree within a hundred yards of the one in ambush.

As he did so he saw a lasso whirled around the head of the one lying in wait, and the next instant the coil was thrown.

Springing to where he could see who had been caught in the noose, to his surprise Buffalo Bill beheld the very woman who had come to his aid weeks before when he had been hurt not very far from that very spot.

The noose had settled over her shoulders, as she sat in her saddle, and, as her horse gave a bound forward in his fright, there came a sharp twang and the woman was dragged to the ground with a force that the scout knew must have hurt her severely.

In an instant he was rushing like a deer to the scene, and hearing his steps the man who had laid in wait for a woman, turned with a cry of alarm and found himself face to face with one whom he had every reason to fear.

"Buffalo Bill!" broke in startled accents from the man's lips, and dropping the lariat he seized his revolver.

But Buffalo Bill already had his in his hand and halting in his run, for surer aim, he fired, at the same time calling out:

"With my compliments, Injun Nick!"

Down went Injun Nick in a heap, but he rallied, raised his weapon and fired upon the scout as he advanced toward him.

But his aim was untrue, for the hand holding the weapon could hardly grasp it, and he fell forward on his face once more.

"I am glad I did not have to shoot him again, when he was wounded and down; but he was dangerous to the last," and the scout bent over the fallen man, who was gasping for breath, and cried:

"That woman was my promised wife—she fled with another man, and I vowed to have her life."

"Oh! why did you thwart me?"

His head sunk down again and with a convulsive shiver he stretched out dead.

Then Buffalo Bill turned to the woman, who in the excitement of a deadly encounter, he had momentarily forgotten.

She had risen to her feet, but swayed to and fro as though dazed by her fall, while the blood from a cut on her forehead, dropped upon her buckskin jacket.

"Buffalo Bill, you have repaid the debt you owed me, more than repaid it," she said slowly and held out her hand, but reeling suddenly would have fallen had not the scout sprung forward and caught her.

CHAPTER LI.

A MOST TRYING ORDEAL.

"WELL, this is a pretty pickle, here alone with a fainting, perhaps dying woman, and no help near."

So said Buffalo Bill as he stood holding the woman, for a moment seeming to have lost his nerve.

But he quickly recovered himself and bore the woman down the hill to the stream near where his horse was staked out.

Placing her at length upon the mossy bank he bathed her head and forced a swallow of whisky from his flask between her lips.

In a short while she revived and her eyes opened wide and met his.

"You killed him?" she said with a shudder.

"Who do you mean?"

"That man who sought my life."

"Yes, I saw him go into ambush and throw his lariat."

"When I got near enough I discovered

who it was that he had lassoed, and so I ran upon him, he turned and he fell.

"That is all there is to it."

"No, no indeed, not one half, as you shall know."

"Do not worry about it now, for you are hurt, I fear, and should return to your home."

"Were you going there?" she asked, quickly.

"No, I am scouting, for it is reported that the Indians are in an ugly mood just now."

"They are, and do you know I was going to a station on the stage trail to give you warning, to send a note to you, telling you that a large band of warriors were preparing to sweep down within three days upon the fort and settlements."

"Can this be true?" asked the scout.

In response she drew from her bosom a letter, and handing it to the scout said:

"Read that, and then see that on my horse yonder are blankets and food for a couple of days' ride."

The scout looked at the letter and saw that it was addressed to him.

Opening it he read:

"Be on your guard, from Pioneer City to Fort Advance, for Iron Eyes and a thousand picked braves are preparing to strike the settlements by night within the next few days."

"THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY."

"You are true as steel after all," and Buffalo Bill held forth his hand, which the woman grasped.

Then she said:

"I am better now, but do go back at once and prepare for that Indian raid, for I tell you they are strong enough, if it is a surprise, to sweep the whole settlement from the mines beyond Fort Advance to Pioneer City."

"I do not doubt it, if it is a surprise, but now it will not be, thanks to you; but I shall leave you only when I see you safe in the hands of the two old negroes who nursed me so kindly."

The woman would have refused, but it was evident, when she attempted to rise that she was more severely hurt than she wished to believe, so she said:

"I believe I will have to tax your kindness, Buffalo Bill, to go a part of the way with me."

"I will go all the way, for you are in no condition to look after yourself."

"I will bring your horse and mine."

"But I cannot blindfold you this time, and I—"

"Will you take my word that I will not betray your secret and trust me to go unblindfolded to your cabin?"

"I will," and she passed her hand over her head as though she was suffering pain.

The scout went at once to the woman's horse, that was grazing not far away, and readily caught him.

Then he saddled Lucifer and his pack-horse, and raised the woman to her saddle.

She reeled as though about to fall, and said:

"What will you do about him?" and she shuddered.

"I will care for his body upon my return."

She said no more and Buffalo Bill rode by her side as she pointed out the way.

But when they reached the spot where she had blindfolded the scout she swayed far over and he quickly caught her to prevent her falling from her saddle.

Night was falling then, and never in his life before had Buffalo Bill found himself in such a trying position.

"Iron Eyes and his whole band are not a marker to this," he muttered.

Then he meditated a moment, and brightened up as a thought flashed upon him and he cried:

"See here, Lucifer, you were not blindfolded when we went there before, so what is the matter with your being the guide?"

Lucifer shook his head as though he understood the situation fully, when the scout said:

"Why, I forgot her horse, and I can carry her better from her side saddle than if I ride my own."

He then laid the unconscious woman upon a large rock, sprung upon her horse, and bending over took her gently in his arms.

"Now go home, horse, for you should know the way well, and you follow, Lucifer, with your pard to bring up the rear."

The horse carrying his double load moved away as though he did know the trail, and Lucifer and the pack-animal followed through the gathering gloom of nightfall.

CHAPTER LII.

THE SCOUT SAMARITAN.

THE horse of the mysterious woman walked rapidly and never once hesitated on the homeward trail.

In spite of bearing the unconscious woman in his arms, Buffalo Bill took in every step of the way, saw where the horse turned into the stream at a certain point and crossed to the other side.

Then how he went along the other bank for some distance, again turned into the stream and crossed to what appeared to be a large island with steep shores that could not be climbed.

But the horse found a landing place between two rocks, or rather one large one which had split in twain, and after a short climb came out upon a level meadow in the center of a rock-bound island, the upper end of which towered into lofty cliffs.

A light was visible ahead and toward this the horse made his way, Lucifer and the other animal following close at his heels.

Buffalo Bill was not sure just what welcome he would receive.

Who, he thought, would be there to receive him other than the two negroes, Old Toby and Polly.

He did not wish to alarm them, at sight of him, or their mistress in an unconscious condition; but there was nothing else to do but go on, so go on he did, and the horse neighed as he entered the little canyon in which the cabin stood.

The neigh brought old Toby to the door and he called out:

"I declar, ef Missy Mildred hain't come back ag'in."

"Ho, Uncle Toby, how are you—I am Buffalo Bill," called out the scout from the darkness.

"Lordy! what fetch you here ag'in, massa?" cried Toby, not yet able to see the scout, having just come from the brightly lighted cabin.

"To bring your mistress, Toby, for she has had a fall, just such as I had, and is hurt, so call Polly to aid her."

The two negroes were greatly excited as the scout halted before the cabin with their mistress unconscious in his arms, but his calm manner soon quieted them, and lifting the limp form of the woman down from across the horse, Toby bore it into the cabin.

"Lordy, massa, she hain't dead be she?" cried the old negro man anxiously.

"No, but she has been unconscious a long time, so we must bring her to."

"My old woman's as good as any doctor, sah, and she'll know what to do," Toby said, and the form was laid upon a cot, and restoratives administered.

It was a long time before consciousness returned, and when it did the woman was very weak and complained of pain in the head.

With the skill of a surgeon, Buffalo Bill, who had had much experience in wounds, bathed the wound, drew the cut together and then held it close with sticking plaster which he always carried with him.

"You must remain until I get better—to-morrow—for I have something to say to you, and you yet have several days to give warning."

"Will you stay?"

The woman spoke in a low tone, but Buffalo Bill heard all that she said and answered:

"Yes, I will remain until to-morrow."

"Thank you," and she smiled as though glad of his obeying her request.

Left to the care of old Polly she seemed to rally, and after awhile the negress came out and reported that her mistress seemed much better and had gone to sleep.

Supper was prepared for the scout and after eating it, as the mysterious woman seemed resting quietly, he went to his blankets to rest.

In the morning he found the negress and Toby looking very anxious, and they told

him that their mistress had fever and was talking in delirium.

The scout went in to see her and found it was only too true, for the woman was delirious and had a high fever.

He hardly knew what to say or do, and at last said:

"See here, Toby, it was a man who attacked your mistress, one who is known as Injun Nick over in the settlement."

"Do you know of such a man?"

"No, boss."

"Well, he caught her with his lariat and dragged her heavily from the saddle."

"I saw it, went to her aid and killed him."

"Then, finding that your mistress was badly hurt I brought her here."

"How you find de way, Massa Bill?"

"I let her own horse be my guide."

"You is awful cunnin', sah, 'fore de Lord you is," said Toby, admiringly.

"Well, I am compelled to go, Toby, and yet would not leave your sick mistress unless I had to do so."

"But I hope she will come round all right, and soon I hope to be back and bring some one with me who can help her back to recovery, Uncle Toby," and with another look at the sick woman, and the dread in his heart that he would never see her again alive, Buffalo Bill took his departure.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN SUSPENSE.

THE trail away from the lone cabin Buffalo Bill had no difficulty in following, having been over it.

Had he not known it, Lucifer would have carried him unerringly.

The face of the scout was clouded as he left, for he felt that he was leaving the woman at a time when she most needed his aid.

Ill with fever, delirious, and hovering between life and death, the chances were that she would die there in her lone cabin.

But the warning she had given him he dared not neglect.

He had, in a measure, repaid his debt of gratitude to her in that he had saved her from Injun Nick, who had seemingly sought her life.

He had taken her to her home and left her in the kindest of hands, those who appeared to be her dearest of friends.

But he must return and spread the warning she had given him, for upon that thousands of lives depended, the lives of women and children and their homes and all they possessed as well.

Buffalo Bill had felt that the Indians had been too quiet of late for any good, and now he knew that they had been hatching deviltry.

The miners numbered several hundred men, in the settlement were half a hundred more, and the fort could put into the field of light artillery, cavalry and infantry fully five hundred fighting soldiers.

Then there was the settlement of Pioneer City and there could be mustered several hundred fighting men.

In all, Buffalo Bill knew that all of twelve hundred brave men could be rallied to resist the Indians, and readily beat them off.

But a surprise was where the red-skins could do their damage, for a thousand warriors striking the mines at night, the fort and the settlement, and then sweeping through Pioneer City would cause the death of hundreds of brave fellows, result in the massacre of woman and children and destroy property that it would take years to replace.

So, to prevent a surprise, to prepare a surprise for the Indians, was Buffalo Bill's earnest hope.

He therefor was anxious to get back on the trail, meet Lieutenant Worth and his party, and send the news to prepare for an Indian attack to Pioneer City, the settlement surrounding it, the stage stations, the fort and the mines.

Once the tocsin of alarm was sounded, and the red-skins would be beaten at their own game, for they would be the ones surprised.

Believing that the mysterious woman who had befriended him was in some way allied to the road-agents, Buffalo Bill had distrusted her.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A RED-SKIN STAMPEDE.

If Sergeant Fallon had really arranged to have his words verified he could not have had it better, as when Buffalo Bill rode up he said, as he saluted:

"Lieutenant Worth, the firing proved that the Indians first struck the fort with all their force, or an ambush prepared for them, and they were quickly sent off in retreat in this direction, for they were cut off from going back on their trail.

"The cavalry is pursuing and they are in full flight, coming rapidly this way, so that it will be well to get into position, sir."

The guns were at once placed by Lieutenant Mayo in the positions selected for them by Buffalo Bill, and scouts were sent to lead the troopers by different passes down into the valley, to charge out upon the red-skins after the six-pounders had sent a score of shells down into their ranks.

Just as the mounted men got into position, and were standing by the side of their horses, the rumble of hoofs crossing the Canyon River bridge was heard and the advance of the retreating force was known to be crossing.

Shots were still rattling in a lively manner in the rear of the retreating column of red-skins, who, defeated in their intended surprise and attack that was to gain for them so many scalps and so much booty, were stubbornly resisting the charging of their pursuers who kept their carbines playing upon them.

Once across the bridge, and Iron Eyes the chief rallied his warriors for a stand to beat back their foes and punish them, as he knew they were but few and far from the fort.

But suddenly a red flame shot out from the dark hillside behind them, and not a quarter of a mile distant, followed by a second livid glare.

Then was heard a burst like a peal of thunder, another, and the shrieking sound of iron whirl through the air.

A few seconds more and into the black mass of men and horses, burst first one and then another shell.

The effect was electrical, for it told the red-skins that their raid was but too well known and prepared for.

They were between two fires, and, as the two guns fired now rapidly, sending bursting shell after shell into their midst, with terror in their hearts a panic seized them and they started in a wild flight up the valley through which glided the Canyon River.

Hardly had they begun their flight, when there gleamed out from the base of the hills what appeared to be myriads of fireflies, only there came the rattle of rifles with the gleaming, and bullets pattered like rain upon warriors and ponies.

A bugle then sounded its ringing charge, and with cheers from the cavalry, and wild yells from the Volunteer Rangers there dashed out of the timber a perfect avalanche of horseflesh and humanity.

Revolvers flashed then, and it was seen that there were several gallant horsemen far in the lead using their swords upon the flying red-skins.

These were Lieutenant Worth and Mayo, Buffalo Bill and Sergeant Fallon.

Then it was that the wild flight became a mad stampede, carbines and rifles cracked, revolvers rattled, wild yells echoed from the cliffs, and when dawn broke upon the scene it showed panting ponies urged on and on by red riders, with white pursuers in hot chase still, and all along the trail they had come the bodies of dead and wounded men and horses dotted the way.

"Sound the recall, bugler."

"We will camp here, and later push on in pursuit, though we can never hope to come up with the red-skins now," said the young commander, his face flushed with victory.

"It was a complete wipe out, lieutenant," said Buffalo Bill.

"They are stampeded so that nothing will stop them until they are safe in their village."

"If Iron-Eyes brought a thousand braves with him he has lost a third of them at least."

"Yes, Cody, and we have lost heavily, for poor Lieutenant Mayo would leave his guns and come in the charge, and he has fallen, while I lost Sergeant Velt and half a dozen troopers killed and a number wounded, and the Volunteers suffered heavily also; but it is a glorious victory."

Sergeant Fallon just then came up, recalled by the bugle, a wound in his arm from a bullet and an arrow's gash upon his head.

"Sergeant Fallon, if my word goes for anything, you will wear a shoulder-strap for this day's work, for you saved my life twice, killed the chief who shot Lieutenant Mayo, and prevented his being scalped, and the men are loud in your praise."

"I thank you, Lieutenant Worth, and twice did Buffalo Bill save my life."

"Oh, yes, he makes a business of daring and good deeds, but he would rather be chief of scouts than wear a colonel's epaulettes, I verily believe, for he has refused a commission half a dozen times, to my knowledge."

"Never mind me, lieutenant, for there are the wounded to look after," said Buffalo Bill, flushing at the officer's words of praise.

An officer from the fort now came up and reported that ambulances and surgeons were coming to care for the wounded, and staking their horses out all hands were set to bringing in the wounded and establishing a camp on the banks of a small stream, and in a thick growth of pine timber, for the battle, though won, had left death and suffering in its wake.

CHAPTER LIX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

It was the request of Buffalo Bill that he should take half a dozen of his scouts, and Sergeant Fallon and a dozen of troopers and follow slowly on after the red-skins, leaving Lieutenant Worth with the rest of the men who had gone on the trail of the Red Hands, to follow at his leisure.

"It would be well to make the red-skins believe we are following them in force, sir, and then there will be no stragglers, so that we will have none of them to fear when we again strike the trail of the Red Hands, sir," Buffalo Bill had said.

"You are right, Cody, and I will so state it in a letter to the colonel, and turn over the command here to Lieutenant Deering."

"And please state, sir, that we were on the trail of the Red Hands with every show of success, but turned back to give warning of the Indian raid, but now can press on with greater safety and confidence than before."

"I will do so, Cody."

"And another thing, please ask the colonel to lend you Bat Brindley to take along, for I may need his services, and it will be well to have him with us if wanted."

"All right, and it's a good idea."

"One thing more, sir, please."

"Fire away at will, Cody, for you are hitting the bull's-eye thus far at every shot."

"I see that Surgeon Denmead is on the field, sir, taking care of the wounded, and will you have him come on with you to-morrow, lieutenant, for I would esteem it as a personal favor if you would."

"By Jove, but you are level-headed, for we may need him, doubtless will do so, some of us, before we get back."

"Yes, sir, I am very anxious to have him along, for he is a splendid surgeon and does not know what fear is."

"I'll take him, Cody, or rather bring him with me, and explain to the colonel afterward," was the answer, and with a salute Buffalo Bill rode on after his men who had gone on with Sergeant Fallon.

The next day Lieutenant Worth received a reply to his letter to the colonel, in which permission was given him to go on and complete his search for the Red Hands, and suggesting that he had better take a larger force with him.

The colonel also made the request that the lieutenant should take one of the surgeons with him, who was then in the camp looking after the wounded who could not be moved, and this chimed in with just what Buffalo Bill had asked him to do, so Surgeon Dick Denmead was told to get ready to accompany the expedition which it was said was going to still push the Indians in their flight, not a word being hinted about their real object.

The Rangers, under Colonel Buck, having returned to Pioneer City, save the dead, and most seriously wounded, the camp was left in command of a young lieutenant, and Walter Worth, with Will Palmer as scout and guide, a score of cavalrymen and extra horses and pack-animals, started on the trail after Buffalo Bill, Sergeant Fallon and those under them.

It was noon of the next day when they came upon them in camp at the very spot where Injun Nick had had his fatal encounter with Buffalo Bill, and having heard the whole story of the attack on the fort, Lieutenant Worth told how the red-skins had believed that their presence was unknown, and were preparing to dash up and scale the stockade walls of the fort when the twelve-pounders poured a withering fire upon them.

Taken by surprise though they were the Indians had tried still to storm the fort, when they were attacked in their rear by the force sent to cut off their retreat by the way they had come, and then the fight had begun, with very little loss to the soldiers of the garrison and little or no damage.

Pursued by what cavalry could be spared, they had been forced to retreat by the stage trail across Canyon River, and thence up the valley toward their own country, when the splendidly arranged attack of the lieutenant's force had completely stampeded them, though the loss to the pale-faces had been seven in this latter battle.

Lieutenant Worth also told the scout with just pride that the colonel had written him a special letter complimenting him upon his victory, and the carrying out of his plans in such a soldiery way.

"He spoke of you too, Bill, as you will see when I show you the letter, and in a way that will make you blush, while he added:

"It is supposed by all that you are surely fol-

lowing up your victory, to drive Indian stragglers back into their country; but I sincerely hope that you may find Cody's theory of the lost stage coach correct, and rescue Fallon's daughter from the power of those wretches."

"If this can be done it will be a greater victory for you and Buffalo Bill, than the battle of Canyon River has been, and I hold hopes of your success, only be cautious, and if you need more men send for them, for I will order a force sent to the present hospital camp for you to call on, as it will be a day nearer to you, and thus save time."

"I will have these two parts of Troops A, and B, under officers whom you rank, and the two light guns also, so you may know what you have to fall back on, should, after all, you find the red-skins troublesome, which however I do not expect to be the case, though Buffalo Bill will know about this better than any one else, and consult him freely, always feeling that his advice is the best."

"Now, Bill, I consider that a most complimentary letter," said the lieutenant as he finished reading it.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SCOUT'S SECRET.

THE camp where the little band had halted, had been chosen by Buffalo Bill as the very spot for a base of operations.

It was in a small mound valley, through which flowed a stream of purest water, and there was a meadow of the very finest grass.

Wood was plentiful, and more, the valley was naturally fortified, for upon three sides a towering cliff, which could not be flanked or scaled from the other side, furnished a strong defense, while a ridge on the remaining approach was as strong as a fort from which to beat off a foe of ten times the force of the band.

With a couple of sentinels on the ridge, the camp beyond in the little basin was well guarded, while a scout on the outside could readily discover the approach of a foe a long distance off.

It was in this valley where Buffalo Bill had camped for the night when he discovered Injun Nick going into ambush and so cleverly thwarted him in his attack on the mysterious woman of the island, though not in time to save her a fall; but for this delay the scout could not be censured, as he did not know who it was Injun Nick intended to assail.

Having gone into camp for the night, and with the intention of using that encampment as a starting point, Buffalo Bill said to Lieutenant Worth after supper:

"Lieutenant, I have a secret which just now I cannot make known, as I am under a pledge not to do so."

"But soon I hope to be able to tell you all."

"In your own time, Cody, for I know you act only for the best."

"Thank you, sir; but what I wish to ask you now is to allow Surgeon Denmead to go with me to-night on a little expedition."

"All right, Cody, if he cares to do so."

"I have not asked him yet, sir, first preferring to speak to you about it."

"Then ask him, Cody, for I am more than willing, and leave it to you to explain in your own good time."

The scout at once sought Doctor Denmead, the handsome young surgeon of the outfit, and who had made himself quite a name for his skill in surgery and medicine.

"Doctor, I've come to ask you if you will go on a night scout with me."

"Certainly, Cody, if you wish it."

"It is under peculiar circumstances which I hardly know how to explain, sir."

"Never mind the circumstances, Bill, if I can help you."

"I'll have to ask a pledge of you, sir!"

"Fire away."

"I must ask you to promise me you will not remember the trail I take you, speak of your trip in any way to others, or guide any one to and from the place where we are to go."

"This is mysterious, Bill."

"It is to see a most mysterious person we are to go, sir, one who was severely hurt the other day, and who even now may be dead, though I sincerely hope not."

"I am with you, Cody."

"It is for you to help this one I ask you to accompany me, and yet I cannot tell you more now."

"I am ready when you say the word," answered the young surgeon.

"I'll get the horses, sir," and the scout walked away.

In ten minutes he had Lucifer and his pack-horse ready, the latter for the surgeon to ride, as both his animals had been over the trail to the island home of the woman of mystery.

"This is not my horse, Bill."

"No, sir, mine, for I wish you to ride him, as he knows the trail, and it is a hard one we are to travel."

"I don't mind it; but I've got my rifle and belt of arms, leaving my sword."

"That is better, sir."

"Now, lead on."

"It is Will Palmer," cried Buffalo Bill, and the young scout drew up with the remark:

"No written dispatches, Lieutenant Worth, but verbal orders for you, sir, from Colonel Carr."

"All right, Palmer, what are they?"

"You have sent warning to Pioneer City, sir?"

"Yes, Chief Cody wrote a note to Agent Buck; but when did the colonel get my letter?"

"This morning, sir, for Scout Brockway killed his horse, then ran on foot to Station Two, and getting a horse there rode that animal to death also."

"Hurrah for Brockway!" cried the lieutenant, and Will Palmer continued:

"The colonel at once told me to mount my horse and come to meet you, halting you on the trail for later orders, but for you to dispatch a man at once to Pioneer City to order the men there to meet you and be ready to pursue the Indians when they start in retreat."

"I will send a note at once to Agent Buck, and, Cody, will you pick out your best man and horse to carry it?"

"I will give you a man that will get there as fast as a horse can make it," was the scout's response, and five minutes after one of Buffalo Bill's men was flying along the trail toward Pioneer City, with orders to change horses at Stations Two and One.

CHAPTER LXI.

ORDERS FROM THE FORT.

HAVING seen the courier off, and gone into camp in the rear of Fort Rock, the lieutenant, Buffalo Bill and Sergeant Fallon were listening to Will Palmer's story of how the news of the intended raid had been received in the fort.

He stated that a courier had also been sent to the mines and another to the settlement near the fort, so that all would be warned in good time.

"Well, Palmer, how did you come out with your captives?" asked Buffalo Bill when the scout had told his story.

"I'll tell you, sir."

"We, that is Jack Harding and I, bagged Bat Brindley the first night of our stay at Mooney's cabin, for I suppose you heard that he had made his escape?"

"Yes, the lieutenant informed me yesterday."

"He came to the cabin, called for Mooney and we let him in and took him in, and Jack took him on to the fort."

"Then, sir, I got the Friday courier, by my playing Mooney, and I carried him to the fort, met Jack and we went into ambush for the Sunday man at Monument Hill."

"We got him, but he fought like a tiger, and gave me a wound in the shoulder and came very near killing me—you see where his bullet dented in my belt."

"A close call."

"It was equal to the kick of a mule, chief; but Jack killed him before he could get away with me."

"That was Number Two."

"Yes, sir."

"And the Wednesday man, Number Three?"

"Ah! I don't like to think of him, chief, for I have sad news for you."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Not poor Jack I hope."

"Yes, sir, Jack Harding is dead."

Buffalo Bill's lip quivered, for he recalled the splendid fellow's devoted friendship to him, and how many a long trail they had been on together.

He owed his life to Jack Harding on more than one occasion, and now he was gone forever.

"How was it, Palmer?" he asked, while Lieutenant Worth said sadly:

"Poor Jack Harding."

"We went to the rendezvous, and as I looked like Mooney when I had his rig on I used myself as a decoy."

"I went into the little canyon, and Jack took a stand near by in a thicket."

"The fellow came slowly, and had heard evidently of the two couriers who did not return, so he was scared and looked it."

"He saw me, but got on to my game as I approached him, and wheeling started off at a run."

"I dropped his horse, but he was as nim-

ble as a cat, fell on his feet and opened fire on me."

"Then Jack came at a run, and the fellow brought him to his knees with a shot, for he was game and shot to kill."

"But Jack still fought, and got another shot that was fatal, before I could save him."

"And the man escaped, Palmer?"

"Oh no, chief, I killed him, for I avenged poor Jack."

"Did Jack die at once?"

"He lived long enough to ask me to tell you that he died with his boots on doing his duty, and that, as a scout he could ask no more."

"And then, Will?" asked Buffalo Bill, his voice husky with emotion.

"I rode to the fort, sir, and made my report, and an ambulance was sent after Jack, and he was buried with honor, but we planted the Red Hand where he fell."

"Then you have one a prisoner, and killed two?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Brindley is one, so that accounts for four of the Riders, surely?"

"The band is thinning out, Bill, since they sounded your Death-Knell so boldly," observed Lieutenant Worth.

"There are still enough left to do mischief, lieutenant; but, the sentinel has challenged some one."

It was dark, now, and a horseman had been halted by the sentinel stationed in the timber bordering the stage trail.

As he came forward it was a cavalryman, and saluting, he said:

"Dispatches from the colonel, sir."

"All right, my man. Look to your horse and then get your supper," answered Lieutenant Worth.

Opening the dispatch the officer read:

"You are to gather all the force you can from Pioneer City, assume command, and camp at, or near Rock Fort, to be ready to strike the Indians who will be forced to retreat across Canyon River."

"Have Cody and his scouts watch for the proper moment to strike them, and then open fire and drive them hard, using your own discretion as to how far you had best go in pursuit."

"Lieutenant Mayo, with two pieces of light artillery, escorted by a sergeant and platoon of your own troop are on their way to join you, and should arrive by midnight at your camp."

"Thank Buffalo Bill for me for his warning of the raid, which you notified me of; you will find him an invaluable aid to you."

Should the red-skins be in larger force than reported, and make a stubborn stand after their attack, you could come to our aid and stampede them with your command."

This letter from Colonel Carr gave joy to the heart of the young officer, for it was his first large separate command, and certainly a most important one for a man of his years.

CHAPTER LVII.

TO MEET THE RED FOE.

THE promotion he had temporarily received, in no wise turned the cool head of Walter Worth, but he set to work to arrange his plans to make no mistake.

Another courier was dispatched with a letter to Agent Buck, telling him of the reinforcement of soldiers that were coming from the fort, with two guns that would add greatly to their strength, and requesting him to come on with his men, mounting them on the best horses that could be procured and arming them thoroughly, while they were to bring provisions with them to last until supplies of rations could be gotten from the fort.

The camping-place for the artillery was then picked out, fires built and supper prepared, and before the time named for their arrival by Colonel Carr, they came up at a trot, for Lieutenant Mayo was another young officer of the Worth stripe and never tarried under orders.

Walter Worth was glad to find that several more scouts had come along with the guns, and extra cavalymen, and he congratulated himself upon having half a hundred gallant fellows under his command, independent of those who were coming from Pioneer City.

It was nine o'clock the next morning when

the scouts reported the advance guard of the Pioneer City Volunteers in sight.

Colonel Buck was at their head, but he was only too glad to relinquish his honorary title and report to the lieutenant for orders, for the "colonel" was a better hotel man than he was a soldier, though no one could cast a reflection upon his courage.

"I've got three mounted companies for you, lieutenant, fifty men each, with a reserve force with the provision-train."

"All are well armed and are greedy for scalps just now, so just give your orders and they will be obeyed," said the colonel, and he added:

"I took Buffalo Bill's advice, called in all the people, and arming those who remained at the city, put a guard around the place so that no spy could go and head the red-skins off with word that we were ready for them."

"It was a wise move, colonel, and you have a gallant lot of men with you, I see."

"Let them go into camp, and there is fine grazing for their horses in the lowlands yonder, and we will have ample notice of the coming of the red-skins, for Buffalo Bill and two of his scouts have gone out to reconnoiter."

"You expect them soon, then, sir?"

"Yes, colonel; for Buffalo Bill says that they will strike the fort to-night, and in that case they will be in full retreat by midnight."

The colonel's "army" went into camp, one and all of the men anxious to get at the Indians and give them a lesson they would long remember.

The mule train and its reserve had come up by noon from Pioneer City, and the pack-animals with supplies and extra ammunition arrived soon after from the fort, and when the young officer looked over his encampment, of two hundred and fifty men he earnestly prayed that the chance might be given him to hurl them into battle under his command.

It was just after nightfall that a courier from the fort arrived with a dispatch which read:

"Scout Marsden has just come in with news that the Indians are advancing by the fort trail to strike here first."

"We are all prepared for them, and when we get them in full retreat will push them hard, as you and your fresh men and horses can strike them in Canyon River Valley."

Lieutenant Worth had just looked at his watch and stated that it was eleven o'clock, when Scout Will Palmer dashed into camp and said:

"Chief Cody sent me to say, sir, that the attack had begun at the fort, for he can hear the guns distinctly at Monument Hill, and it will be well to get in motion, sir, and go into position on the ridge over Canyon River, and which he has examined carefully and can guide you to, sir."

The bugle rung out, calling the command to arms, and fifteen minutes after the force was on the march, Lieutenant Worth in advance, and Sergeant Fallon acting as aide riding by his side.

As they neared the valley of Canyon River, the roar of distant firing was heard by all, and as it grew louder and louder Colonel Buck said anxiously:

"They are making a hard fight of it, lieutenant."

"It is a running fight, sir, for they are in retreat and hotly pursued."

It was Sergeant Fallon who spoke, and in his quiet way that carried conviction with what he said.

"That is it, is it, sergeant?"

"I feared, like the colonel, that the Indians were making a hard fight of it for the fort."

"No, lieutenant, they were surprised when they hoped to sweep into the fort, and then put to flight."

"The cavalry are driving them, sir, and firing as they pursue, the Indians returning the fire as they flee."

"When you strike them, sir, it will be a double surprise and result in a complete stampede."

The words of the sergeant were listened to with respect by the two young officers and Colonel Buck.

Hardly had he spoken when Buffalo Bill dashed up to where they stood.

CHAPTER LVIII.

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"Lieutenant Worth, the firing proved that the Indians first struck the fort with all their force, or an ambush prepared for them, and they were quickly sent off in retreat in this direction, for they were cut off from going back on their trail."

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Just as the mounted men got into position, and were standing by the side of their horses, the rumble of hoofs crossing the Canyon River bridge was heard and the advance of the retreating force was known to be closing.

Shots were still rattling in a lively manner in the rear of the retreating column of red-skins, who, defeated in their intended surprise and attack that was to gain for them so many scalps and so much booty, were stubbornly resisting the charging of their pursuers who kept their carbines playing upon them.

Once across the bridge, and Iron Eyes the chief rallied his warriors for a stand to beat back their foes and punish them, as he knew they were but few and far from the fort.

But suddenly a red flame shot out from the dark hillside behind them, and not a quarter of a mile distant, followed by a second livid glare.

Then was heard a burst like a peal of thunder, another, and the shrieking sound of iron whirl through the air.

A few seconds more and into the black mass of men and horses, burst first one and then another shell.

The effect was electrical, for it told the red-skins that their raid was but too well known and prepared for.

They were between two fires, and, as the two guns fired now rapidly, sending bursting shell after shell into their midst, with terror in their hearts a panic seized them and they started in a wild flight up the valley through which glided the Canyon River.

Hardly had they begun their flight, when there gleamed out from the base of the hills what appeared to be myriads of fireflies, only there came the rattle of rifles with the gleaming, and bullets pattered like rain upon warriors and ponies.

A bugle then sounded its ringing charge, and with cheers from the cavalry, and wild yells from the Volunteer Rangers there dashed out of the timber a perfect avalanche of horseflesh and humanity.

Revolvers flashed then, and it was seen that there were several gallant horsemen far in the lead using their swords upon the flying red-skins.

These were Lieutenant Worth and Mayo, Buffalo Bill and Sergeant Fallon.

Then it was that the wild flight became a mad stampede, carbines and rifles cracked, revolvers rattled, wild yells echoed from the cliffs, and when dawn broke upon the scene it showed panting ponies urged on and on by red riders, with white pursuers in hot chase still, and all along the trail they had come the bodies of dead and wounded men and horses dotted the way.

"Sound the recall, bugler."

"We will camp here, and later push on in pursuit, though we can never hope to come up with the red-skins now," said the young commander, his face flushed with victory.

"It was a complete wipe out, lieutenant," said Buffalo Bill.

"They are stampeded so that nothing will stop them until they are safe in their village."

"If Iron-Eyes brought a thousand braves with him he has lost a third of them at least."

"Yes, Cody, and we have lost heavily, for poor Lieutenant Mayo would leave his guns and come in the charge, and he has fallen, while I lost Sergeant Velt and half a dozen troopers killed and a number wounded, and the Volunteers suffered heavily also; but it is a glorious victory."

Sergeant Fallon just then came up, recalled by the bugle, a wound in his arm from a bullet and an arrow's gash upon his head.

"Sergeant Fallon, if my word goes for anything, you will wear a shoulder-strap for this day's work, for you saved my life twice, killed the chief who shot Lieutenant Mayo, and prevented his being scalped, and the men are loud in your praise."

"I thank you, Lieutenant Worth, and twice did Buffalo Bill save my life."

"Oh, yes, he makes a business of daring and good deeds, but he would rather be chief of scouts than wear a colonel's epaulettes, I verily believe, for he has refused a commission half a dozen times, to my knowledge."

"Never mind me, lieutenant, for there are the wounded to look after," said Buffalo Bill, flushing at the officer's words of praise.

An officer from the fort now came up and reported that ambulances and surgeons were coming to care for the wounded, and staking their horses out all hands were set to bringing in the wounded and establishing a camp on the banks of a small stream, and in a thick growth of pine timber, for the battle, though won, had left death and suffering in its wake.

CHAPTER LIX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

It was the request of Buffalo Bill that he should take half a dozen of his scouts, and Sergeant Fallon and a dozen of troopers and follow slowly on after the red-skins, leaving Lieutenant Worth with the rest of the men who had gone on the trail of the Red Hands, to follow at his leisure.

"It would be well to make the red-skins believe we are following them in force, sir, and then there will be no stragglers, so that we will have none of them to fear when we again strike the trail of the Red Hands, sir," Buffalo Bill had said.

"You are right, Cody, and I will so state it in a letter to the colonel, and turn over the command here to Lieutenant Deering."

"And please state, sir, that we were on the trail of the Red Hands with every show of success, but turned back to give warning of the Indian raid, but now can press on with greater safety and confidence than before."

"I will do so, Cody."

"And another thing, please ask the colonel to lend you Bat Brindley to take along, for I may need his services, and it will be well to have him with us if wanted."

"All right, and it's a good idea."

"One thing more, sir, please."

"Fire away at will, Cody, for you are hitting the bull's-eye thus far at every shot."

"I see that Surgeon Denmead is on the field, sir, taking care of the wounded, and will you have him come on with you to-morrow, lieutenant, for I would esteem it as a personal favor if you would."

"By Jove, but you are level-headed, for we may need him, doubtless will do so, some of us, before we get back."

"Yes, sir, I am very anxious to have him along, for he is a splendid surgeon and does not know what fear is."

"I'll take him, Cody, or rather bring him with me, and explain to the colonel afterward," was the answer, and with a salute Buffalo Bill rode on after his men who had gone on with Sergeant Fallon.

The next day Lieutenant Worth received a reply to his letter to the colonel, in which permission was given him to go on and complete his search for the Red Hands, and suggesting that he had better take a larger force with him.

The colonel also made the request that the lieutenant should take one of the surgeons with him, who was then in the camp looking after the wounded who could not be moved, and this chimed in with just what Buffalo Bill had asked him to do, so Surgeon Dick Denmead was told to get ready to accompany the expedition which it was said was going to still push the Indians in their flight, not a word being hinted about their real object.

The Rangers, under Colonel Buck, having returned to Pioneer City, save the dead, and most seriously wounded, the camp was left in command of a young lieutenant, and Walter Worth, with Will Palmer as scout and guide, a score of cavalrymen and extra horses and pack-animals, started on the trail after Buffalo Bill, Sergeant Fallon and those under them.

It was noon of the next day when they came upon them in camp at the very spot where Injun Nick had had his fatal encounter with Buffalo Bill, and having heard the whole story of the attack on the fort, Lieutenant Worth told how the red-skins had believed that their presence was unknown, and were preparing to dash up and scale the stockade walls of the fort when the twelve-pounders poured a withering fire upon them.

Taken by surprise though they were the Indians had tried still to storm the fort, when they were attacked in their rear by the force sent to cut off their retreat by the way they had come, and then the fight had begun, with very little loss to the soldiers of the garrison and little or no damage.

Pursued by what cavalry could be spared, they had been forced to retreat by the stage trail across Canyon River, and thence up the valley toward their own country, when the splendidly arranged attack of the lieutenant's force had completely stampeded them, though the loss to the pale-faces had been seven in this latter battle.

Lieutenant Worth also told the scout with just pride that the colonel had written him a special letter complimenting him upon his victory, and the carrying out of his plans in such a soldiery way.

"He spoke of you too, Bill, as you will see when I show you the letter, and in a way that will make you blush, while he added:

"It is supposed by all that you are surely fol-

lowing up your victory, to drive Indian stragglers back into their country; but I sincerely hope that you may find Cody's theory of the lost stage coach correct, and rescue Fallon's daughter from the power of those wretches."

"If this can be done it will be a greater victory for you and Buffalo Bill, than the battle of Canyon River has been, and I hold hopes of your success, only be cautious, and if you need more men send for them, for I will order a force sent to the present hospital camp for you to call on, as it will be a day nearer to you, and thus save time."

"I will have these two parts of Troops A, and B, under officers whom you rank, and the two light guns also, so you may know what you have to fall back on, should, after all, you find the red-skins troublesome, which however I do not expect to be the case, though Buffalo Bill will know about this better than any one else, and consult him freely, always feeling that his advice is the best."

"Now, Bill, I consider that a most complimentary letter," said the lieutenant as he finished reading it.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SCOUT'S SECRET.

THE camp where the little band had halted, had been chosen by Buffalo Bill as the very spot for a base of operations.

It was in a small mound valley, through which flowed a stream of purest water, and there was a meadow of the very finest grass.

Wood was plentiful, and more, the valley was naturally fortified, for upon three sides a towering cliff, which could not be flanked or scaled from the other side, furnished a strong defense, while a ridge on the remaining approach was as strong as a fort from which to beat off a foe of ten times the force of the band.

With a couple of sentinels on the ridge, the camp beyond in the little basin was well guarded, while a scout on the outside could readily discover the approach of a foe a long distance off.

It was in this valley where Buffalo Bill had camped for the night when he discovered Injun Nick going into ambush and so cleverly thwarted him in his attack on the mysterious woman of the island, though not in time to save her a fall; but for this delay the scout could not be censured, as he did not know who it was Injun Nick intended to assail.

Having gone into camp for the night, and with the intention of using that encampment as a starting point, Buffalo Bill said to Lieutenant Worth after supper:

"Lieutenant, I have a secret which just now I cannot make known, as I am under a pledge not to do so."

"But soon I hope to be able to tell you all."

"In your own time, Cody, for I know you act only for the best."

"Thank you, sir; but what I wish to ask you now is to allow Surgeon Denmead to go with me to-night on a little expedition."

"All right, Cody, if he cares to do so."

"I have not asked him yet, sir, first preferring to speak to you about it."

"Then ask him, Cody, for I am more than willing, and leave it to you to explain in your own good time."

The scout at once sought Doctor Denmead, the handsome young surgeon of the outfit, and who had made himself quite a name for his skill in surgery and medicine.

"Doctor, I've come to ask you if you will go on a night scout with me."

"Certainly, Cody, if you wish it."

"It is under peculiar circumstances which I hardly know how to explain, sir."

"Never mind the circumstances, Bill, if I can help you."

"I'll have to ask a pledge of you, sir!"

"Fire away."

"I must ask you to promise me you will not remember the trail I take you, speak of your trip in any way to others, or guide any one to and from the place where we are to go."

"This is mysterious, Bill."

"It is to see a most mysterious person we are to go, sir, one who was severely hurt the other day, and who even now may be dead, though I sincerely hope not."

"I am with you, Cody."

"It is for you to help this one I ask you to accompany me, and yet I cannot tell you more now."

"I am ready when you say the word," answered the young surgeon.

"I'll get the horses, sir," and the scout walked away.

In ten minutes he had Lucifer and his pack-horse ready, the latter for the surgeon to ride, as both his animals had been over the trail to the island home of the woman of mystery.

"This is not my horse, Bill."

"No, sir, mine, for I wish you to ride him, as he knows the trail, and it is a hard one we are to travel."

"I don't mind it; but I've got my rifle and belt of arms, leaving my sword."

"That is better, sir."

"Now, lead on."

Buffalo Bill threw himself into his saddle and rode out of the camp, the surgeon following close behind him.

"We hope to be back by daylight, lieutenant, but do not be anxious should we be delayed," said the scout as he passed the camp-fire at which sat Lieutenant Worth and Sergeant Fallon.

On rode Buffalo Bill, taking the trail he now knew quite well, having been twice over it, while Lucifer moved along as though he was going to a place familiar to him.

Crossing the stream here and there, and at last coming to the point where he had to strike out for the island, Buffalo Bill saw what his course was, but left it to his horse to see if he was right.

Lucifer proved this by going into the stream and heading for the break in the rocky bank of the island, the surgeon in silence following close behind, and wondering what strange secret there was that the scout had to reveal to him.

CHAPTER LXI.

A FAIR SUFFERER.

BUFFALO BILL felt that he had almost gained a victory, when he came in sight of the light shining from the cabin in the canyon on the island.

He had made up his mind that the fair sufferer whom he had left there, the woman who had served him so well, and who at first he had felt he was quits with, in killing Injun Nick, needed medical aid, and for that reason he had wished Surgeon Denmead to come along.

He felt that he could trust the young surgeon implicitly with his secret, and that he might, with his great skill, save the life of the woman.

He had asked him to bring along his medicine case, some stimulants and also his case of surgical instruments, for he did not know just what was needed.

Instead of being "quits" with the woman for his return services to her, the scout now felt that all at the fort and in the settlements owed to her the deepest gratitude, for, but for the warning given him of the Indian raid, they would have suffered terribly and perhaps hundreds of lives would have been lost.

Now, as the light gleamed before him, Buffalo Bill felt cheered, and yet there came the dread to his heart that the mysterious woman might have passed away.

Doctor Denmead saw the light, but made no comment.

He trusted all to the scout and rode on in silence.

"Await here one minute, doctor, until I call you," said Buffalo Bill, dismounting, and he advanced on foot toward the cabin.

Presently the form of old Toby came out of the cabin, relieved in the doorway by the light behind him, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Ho, Uncle Toby, come here!"

"Who dat?"

"Buffalo Bill! Come here, please."

The negro at once advanced toward him and meeting him the scout said:

"I am back again, you see, and I hope your mistress is all right."

"Lordy, Massa Bill, my heart am almost broke, for Missy Mildred am de sickest woman I ever seen, sah."

"She have fever dat is burning her up, and she talk wild all de time, while we is almost broke down with watchin' her."

"Toby let me tell you that I have brought a surgeon."

"What dat, boss?"

"A doctor."

"I have brought him from the fort especially to see your mistress, and he has medicines with him and all that she will need to help her."

"But, massa, if she know you fetch some one here?"

"I swore him to keep the secret, Uncle Toby, and he will not tell anything; but he is there on his horse, waiting for me to call him to aid her."

"Massa Bill, you has a good heart, and both me and Polly knows you is acting for Missy Mildred's good."

"Jist wait, sah, until I talks with Polly, and calls you, for something has got to be did afore you can come in; dere is one dar you must not see," and Uncle Toby walked away, leaving the scout to await his return.

"Somebody is there whom I must not see," muttered the scout, and he returned to Surgeon Denmead, and told him to dismount.

The horses were unsaddled and staked out.

After nearly half an hour Uncle Toby came back and said:

"Polly and me has come to de conclusion, sah, dat you is de man to save Missy Mildred's life, so jist come in wid de doctor, sah."

"This is Doctor Denmead, Uncle Toby, and he is anxious to do all he can for your mistress."

"Denmead, sah? You says his name is Denmead?"

"Yes, Uncle Toby; Dick Denmead my friends call me," the surgeon said, pleasantly.

"Lordy, oh, Lordy! it was Denmead folks I

b'longed to, back in slavery days, down in Alabama, boss; but, come right in, sah, and see Missy Mildred."

"Mildred! Mildred who?" asked the doctor.

"Sho Missy Mildred Lamar now, sah."

The scout saw the doctor start, but he made no reply and followed Uncle Toby into the cabin.

In the largest and pleasantest room of the cabin, lying upon a cot bed, was the woman of mystery.

Her face was flushed with fever, but it was thin and haggard since the scout had last seen it, and she was talking in an incoherent way as the doctor and scout entered the room.

Old Polly was there, looking worn out, but she shook hands with the scout and said:

"I is so glad you has come, sah, for de doctor can save her—can't you, doctor?"

"I can try, auntie," and Dick Denmead approached the bed, sat down and took the hand of the woman in his.

His fingers deftly felt her pulse, and then he took her temperature, and said:

"She is very ill, and it appears to have been from an injury, rather than disease."

The scout then explained what had caused it, how she had acted after her fall, her return to consciousness and relapsing into unconsciousness, and all that he could say to aid the doctor, while Polly told what she knew of the illness of her mistress.

The doctor listened with the deepest attention, and then set to work to fight the fever and show what human skill would do against the ravages of disease.

He mixed some medicines for her, placed them on the table with his watch by their side, and then sat down with the remark:

"I will give these myself for the next two hours, Cody, in fact I shall not leave her until the crisis is passed, and as I have used powerful remedies here, I shall hope for quick results."

"Of course I cannot now tell if there is any fracture of the skull, or internal injuries to combat."

"If you deem best you can return to camp and come for me to-morrow night, for I shall stay here, right here, for I, too, have a secret, Cody, and I will tell it to you."

"I felt, when Uncle Toby told you what he did, that you knew this woman, doctor."

"Know her! My God! she is my own sister, Buffalo Bill," was the low, earnest response of the young doctor, and his pale face showed that he was deeply moved by some memory of the past.

CHAPTER LXII.

UNCLE TOBY'S SECRET.

BUFFALO BILL was deeply touched by the words and manner of the young doctor, and said:

"I am so glad that I brought you here, for she needs all of your care."

"I do not believe there is danger to you in leaving you here; but I will reconnoiter, and then return to the camp to report to Lieutenant Worth that you will be delayed a day or two."

"In the mean time I can scout around, strike the old trail of the Red Hands, and perhaps unearth their secret retreat and pounce upon them, for I may tell you now, Doctor Denmead, that Jack Jessop's coach never went down with the Canyon River bridge, but was captured by the Red Hands, and they now have the sergeant's daughter, Lieutenant Ernest Leslie and the others prisoners, or they have killed them."

"The truth of which we will know before we leave this trail; but now I will be off, and to-morrow night I will return."

Doctor Denmead listened attentively to what the scout had said, and replied:

"Well, Cody, you are a wonder, and I look to you to unearth this whole mystery, and an accursed mystery there is right here, in my poor sister dwelling here in this wilderness."

Buffalo Bill, after a few words more with the doctor, left the room and sent Polly in to see if there was anything she could do.

Toby he called one side and said:

"See here, Uncle Toby, I wish to talk plainly to you."

"Yas, boss."

"Your mistress is hovering between life and death, but if she can be saved Doctor Denmead will do it."

"Yas, sah."

"Now suppose she dies, what will you and Aunt Polly do?"

"Lordy, boss, don't talk of it."

"But you must know the truth."

"Dat's so."

"You and Aunt Polly once belonged to her family, I believe?"

"It was jis' dis way, sah."

"Me and Polly belonged to de Denmeads, sah, away down in Alabama."

"My massa, who was a soldier, died and left a wife and child, and she, after a couple of years, married a German by de name of Lamar Markham, don't you see?"

"Well, den, she have 'nother child, and her son by her first husband, Cap'n Denmead, his step-father didn't like, for he want all de pro-

perty for his own chile, a leetle girl, dat's now Missy Mildred."

"So one day de boy, den fifteen or sixteen, ran away from home, sailing away from Mobile in a ship, and nobody hear of him any more."

"Missy Mildred was about thirteen when her brother leave home, and she grew up mighty pretty, and her father want her to marry a friend of his, and old enough to be her Pa."

"But, though she half promise, under his threats, she loved another man, and shortly after her mother's death, she ran off with him."

"Her father's friend was so mad, for he say that he told her to marry the other man on the sly, that they had a quarrel and fought a duel, and Mr. Lamar was kilt."

"Then the other man, his name was Nicholas Burt, he run off to save his life, for nobody liked him, and I declar', boss, he did look like a Injun, and they did say he had red-skin blood in him."

"Injun Nick by all that's holy!" cried Buffalo Bill.

But Uncle Toby went on to say:

"Missy Mildred found, when her father was killed, that she had no fortune coming to her, for he had squandered it all, and then the man she marry was mad clean through."

"They had gone out to Leavenworth to live, and she sent money for me and Polly to come on, and we come."

"But the man she had married was bad clean through, he gambled and turned out to be what they said was an adventurer."

"There was some said he'd been a gold-miner, and a soldier on the frontier, and one day two officers come to arrest him, out on his ranch when he lived near Leavenworth."

"Well, boss, he kilt 'em both and getting on his horse made his escape."

"It was a year after that he sent for Missy Mildred, and she took Polly and me with her."

"Well, boss, he took us in a stage coach on a mighty hard journey, and then we left the coach and rid horseback for a long way, at last coming here, where he had this cabin built and fitted up as you see it now."

"Poor Missy Mildred was heartbroken, for she had found out how bad her husband was, but she could do nothing but stay here, and we cheered her up all we could, only she was never happy."

"The master told her if she betrayed him to any one he would punish her by killin' me and Polly, hangin' us before her eyes."

"He let her go about at will, but made us stay on de island, and swore he'd kill us if we left it."

"Now, Massa Bill, you knows why Missy Mildred is here, and how it was she was so scared when you was here, for missy went to where her husband live, and stay there to keep him from coming here and find you; but she come back the day you left."

"And who is her husband?"

"He says he is a gold-miner, sah, but he digs in folks' pockets for de gold."

"Hal it is Captain Eagle, the chief of the Red Hands. I'll wager my right hand."

"Massa Bill, you is right, sah. Dat am de man; but, don't let him find you and de doctor here, sah."

"I only wish that he would," was the scout's fervent reply, and his words caused Toby to turn ashen with dread.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE SCOUT'S RESOLVE.

BUFFALO BILL had never in his life listened to a story with more interest than he did to what Uncle Toby had told him.

The mysterious woman of the island was not wicked, after all, but the creature of cruel fate, the victim of circumstances over which she had no control.

She had loved unworthily, and had clung to the man who had wrecked her young life; but she had shown that she was a true woman when she had boldly started to find the scout and warn him of the Indian raid.

Uncle Toby had gone on to show, by what he told the scout, that Mildred did not believe her husband to be guilty of murder, only of highway robbery.

This she did know he was guilty of, and that he had a band under his command, but he told her that they were to protect him, that was all.

She knew, also, that he was the friend of Iron Eyes, the Indian chief, who never harmed him or his men, though at war with the soldiers and white settlers.

Only Mildred knew the retreat of the Red Hands, for her husband trusted her in this, and neither Toby or Polly could tell where it was, knowing only that it was nearly half a day's ride from the island.

Not one of the band had ever been seen at the island, either by Toby or Polly, and the chief was wont to come at will, sometimes not for a month at a time, and then again much oftener.

Though treating him with politeness, Uncle Toby said, Mildred had learned to hate him, and

she was constantly entreating him to allow her to take them and go far away from him.

She could have gone alone, for she had become a thorough borderwoman, but she would never leave them, and the chief said that he had a spy constantly watching the island to see that they did not run off with their mistress some night.

Such was the story told in full by Toby, and which the scout heard with the greatest delight.

Uncle Toby also confided to Buffalo Bill the fact that his young mistress had found considerable gold on the island, and had hidden away a large sum, enough to make her rich, the old negro said, and he added that the chief did not know of this, and more, brought his money to Miss Mildred to keep for him.

It had only been a few days since he had last visited the island, and he had then left for his retreat.

"And how strange all this is," mused Buffalo Bill.

"The man whom this unfortunate woman's father wished to force her to marry, killed that father in revenge, fled and came here.

"Then he began to serve her husband, the man she had believed honest and true.

"Did he know him, that he was the one who had run off with Mildred?

"I am half inclined to believe that he did.

"At any rate, when forced to flee from Pioneer City he came in search of the band he was the spy of, and meeting her, sought to make her his prisoner.

"Well, I never felt so glad over a thing in my life, as I do that I was able to call in the chips of Nicholas Burt, *alias* Injun Nick.

"Then too to think that I should bring here to care for the poor woman none other than her half brother.

"I saw Dick Denmead start when Toby said what he did, and when he saw old Polly in the light, and heard them call the name of Mildred.

"He looked at the sufferer as though he would read her soul, and knew, then, that he had found his sister.

"Well, the boy that ran away from home, driven by a step-father's cruelty, did not go to the bad, but made a name for himself, for it will not be long before he is promoted to be surgeon-in-chief at the fort, and he deserves it.

"My plan now is to leave Denmead there at the island until to-morrow night; then we will have to protect him against a visit from the chief, who would kill him, did he go there, missing us.

"He would shoot Denmead down like an assassin, so I will leave Will Palmer and two more of my men in hiding to head off the chief, in case he should make a visit to the island before we reach his retreat.

"Pledges are very well, but mine was made to the woman whom now I must protect, and she got it from me from fear of the consequences to old Toby and Polly.

"I'll go at once to the lieutenant and lay the whole matter before him, save the fact that the woman is Doctor Denmead's sister, for that he can make known or not as he pleases, though he told me.

"Yes, that is my duty and I will do it," and so deciding Buffalo Bill started back for the camp of the outlaw-hunters.

CHAPTER LXIV.

FOUND.

THE lieutenant had just turned out of his blankets when Buffalo Bill rode into camp.

"Ho, Bill, just in time for breakfast; but, where is Denmead?"

"I will tell you, sir," and the scout's serious manner showed that he had something important to communicate.

"I am under a pledge, lieutenant," began the scout, "but I believe, under the circumstances, that it does not bind me to keep it, for it would protect crime if I did so, while to break the pledge will be doing a great deal of good."

"Then break it by all means, Cody."

"I will, sir, and I wish to tell you the whole story."

Then Buffalo Bill told the story of his first meeting with the mysterious woman of the island, what followed, his pledge, and then his second meeting and her mishap and illness.

He told why he had wished Surgeon Denmead to come along, and all that Uncle Toby had told him of the history of his young mistress.

That he had left the surgeon there until the next night he told, and added that he would leave Will Palmer and two scouts in hiding to protect the doctor from a visit of the outlaw leader, while they, the command, went on a search for the retreat of the Red Hands.

"I asked that Bat Brindley should be brought along, lieutenant," continued the scout, "to force from him the secret of where the retreat of the outlaws was.

"Failing to frighten him into a confession, I was determined to make terms with him, as he could only thus save his life.

"Now, not until I am sure that I cannot find the retreat, will I fall back on Brindley; but I

believe that I can find it, for there were a number of horses in the lot, and their trail was made when the ground was muddy, after the storm, and such tracks can yet be followed, as I noticed yesterday.

"I will have breakfast, then go out on a scout to see how far I can follow the trail, and be back in time to go to the island to-night and place my men in hiding, and to-morrow we can start after the Red Hands."

"But you have had no rest."

"Don't need any just now, lieutenant, and can stay awake a week on such work as is now before us."

"All right, Bill, you are the doctor in this case, so prescribe accordingly," answered the lieutenant, and he added:

"We will let Sergeant Fallon into the secret also, as it will be best, in case we get into trouble and both you and I meet with accidents."

"Yes, it will be best, and he is more deeply interested than any of us, sir," responded Buffalo Bill, and they sat down to breakfast, after which the scout went off on the trail with Will Palmer and two of his men, and the lieutenant told to Sergeant Fallon what he had heard of the mysterious dwellers on the island in the river.

Buffalo Bill was determined not to wait until night, to place the scouts in position to protect Doctor Denmead, as the chief might visit the island at any time; so he led his men to a point where they would command the approach of the island, and put them in position where they could catch the chief easily with a lariat, as he had to pass within a few feet of them.

Leaving two of the scouts on duty, he took Will Palmer with him, and they went along on the trail of the Red Hands for several miles until Buffalo Bill said:

"There is no need of going further, for this trail can be readily followed, Palmer, and here, over ten miles nearer to the retreat than our present camp-ground, is a fine camping-place."

"Yes, chief, that is so."

"All right, we will return to camp, and Lieutenant Worth will have all ready for an early start, and then you will go with me to-night to join the other boys who are lying in wait for Captain Eagle.

Returning to camp, Buffalo Bill and Will Palmer had supper and the two then left for the island—Lieutenant Worth saying that he would have all ready for a move upon the chief of scouts' return to camp.

Palmer was left with his two comrades, who had not seen the outlaw chief, and then Buffalo Bill rode on to the cabin on the island.

Uncle Toby met him as he dismounted, and his face was bright with joy as he said:

"De fever done broke, Massa Bill, and Missy Mildred a heap better and she talk reasonable now.

"But, de doctor say she must be very quiet."

"This is good news, Toby; but, who is the white lady I saw just now as I rode up?"

"Massa Bill, I got suthin' to tell you, sah, for I didn't tell you all last right."

"Out with it at once, Uncle Toby."

"You see, sah, Massa Lamar, de chief, he brought a young lady here some time ago, to be kept as a prisoner, until she pays ransom money to go free.

"He say he kill Missy Mildred and me and Polly, if we let her get away, and she was locked up in another cabin when you was here sick, sah.

"But, she beg to come out and nurse missy, who was good to her, and ever since she was so sick, she have been so kind to her night and day, and we don't know what we would have done without her."

"Her name is Miss Lucille Fallon."

"Lordy, boss, how you know that?"

"There are other prisoners, who were captured with her, held at the retreat."

"Dat's a fact, boss, for she done say so."

"All right, Uncle Toby. Ask Miss Fallon to come out here, and do not tell the doctor that I have come, yet."

"Yes, sah," and in a few minutes out of the cabin came a young and beautiful girl.

"Miss Lucille Fallon, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and you—"

"I am known as Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts at Fort Advance."

"You are the same man I once met on my way to the fort."

"I am the scout who has been in search of you, Miss Fallon, since the day of the storm, and I am glad to find you are safe."

"Safe, yes; yet a prisoner here, where that cruel chief brought me three days after my capture, while my unfortunate fellow prisoners, poor Jack Jessop, the lieutenant and the others, are at the outlaws' retreat."

"We are now going to rescue them, Miss Fallon, for Lieutenant Worth and thirty soldiers are within a few miles of here. Your father is along, also, and is hopeful of seeing you soon, for he would not believe that you were dead."

"God bless him! How I long to see him! But Doctor Denmead has told me all that has been done toward my rescue by you and my other good friends.

"Now will you come in and see our patient? for she is convalescing rapidly," and Lucille Fallon led the scout into the cabin, where Mildred Lamar, upon seeing him, smiled and held out her hand, saying, faintly:

"You have broken your pledge, but I forgive you, for it is for the best, and this kind doctor and sweet girl have saved my life."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE RESCUE.

IN spite of their cunning, the Red Hands had not deemed it necessary to conceal their trail so far away from the settlements and the forts.

In fact, in the muddy weather which they had traveled through, it would have been no easy task to conceal their trail, and the truth was that Captain Eagle, the outlaw chief, had relied upon the raid the Indians were to make, to prevent any pursuit of him.

The Indians had made their raid, been savagely whipped, and Chief Iron Eyes had sent for Captain Eagle to come and hold a council with him.

It was unfortunate that such was the case, as when Buffalo Bill led the troopers into the well-hidden outlaw retreat at dawn, the day after his last visit to the island, the leader of the crime-stained band was absent, thus escaping being killed, or captured, and held for a death on the gallows in punishment for his wicked career.

Taken by surprise, the outlaws had been seized with a panic, until, seeing that Buffalo Bill was the one who had guided the soldiers upon them, they felt that there would be no mercy shown them; so they rallied and fought like demons.

But, they fell, one by one, until in their despair the several survivors surrendered, and were soon sent to be company for Bat Brindley in the camp of the victors.

The retreat of the Red Hands was a stronghold that could not readily have been taken save by a surprise, such as was given them by Buffalo Bill.

They had their cabins there, their vegetable garden, cattle, sheep and horses in plenty—all stolen—with quantities of booty, the result of their raiding the settlements.

But best of all they had there what interested the rescuers most of all, for Lieutenant Ernest Lester, Jack Jessop, and the two other passengers were held prisoners in a pen, where they were securely ironed.

All told, the band of Red Hands had numbered a score and half of men, and yet but few remained after the attack on them.

The joy of the prisoners at their release was great, for they were to have been held for a long while, and then enormous ransom was to be demanded for them.

What had become of Lucille Fallon they did not know, as the chief had taken her away, bearing on pack-animals all of her baggage, and they had been most anxious regarding her fate.

When told that she was safe their joy knew no bounds; but one and all greatly regretted that the arch-fiend of all, who called himself Captain Eagle, but whose real name was Loyd Lamar, had gone to the village of Chief Iron Eyes, where he was safe from all pursuit.

The booty having been secured, the cattle and horses gotten together, and the outlaw camp left as it was, to serve, perhaps, for troops at a future time, the party of victors set out on the march homeward the day following their attack.

They marched slowly, and made their second night's camp in the little sheltered valley which they had left to start upon their rescue; and that night Buffalo Bill guided Lieutenant Worth and Sergeant Fallon over to the island, for the services of Doctor Denmead were needed to look after some of the wounded soldiers, and he was to return with them.

Up to the cabin rode the chief of scouts and the two with him.

Buffalo Bill entered, and, a moment after, came out with Lucille Fallon, who found herself clasped to her happy father's arms.

Then the scout learned that Mildred Lamar was improving rapidly, and had changed greatly for the better in the days since he had seen her last; in fact she was now sitting up.

"I can't help but get well rapidly, Buffalo Bill, for I know the truth, now, that this is my own brother, and I am anxious to go away from here at the earliest moment possible," she said.

"And I am anxious to have you do so," added Lieutenant Worth when the scout presented him, "for to be frank with you, I have but a small force, and I fear greatly that the outlaw chief, when he learns the truth, may at once bring a band of red-skins against us."

"Am I not able to start now, brother?"

"In the morning you can make a start, riding as far as the camp, and from there on, until you are stronger, we can arrange to carry you in some way," was the doctor's answer. So it was decided.

There were a number of horses on the island, and these were packed with the traps of the cabin, the baggage of Lucille Fallon, and also served for riding animals for the two negroes.

A gentle, easy horse was saddled for the invalid, and her brother got up behind her so as to lend her his supporting arm, while Will Palmer and the two other scouts drove the pack-animals.

Lucille Fallon rode by Lieutenant Worth's side, while Buffalo Bill and the sergeant aided in every way they could on the march.

At last the camp was reached, and it was decided, as soldiers promptly volunteered to bear the invalid on a litter, to break camp at once, not waiting for the next day.

This was done, the cattle and horses being driven on ahead, while Buffalo Bill and his scouts hung far back in the rear, to prevent a surprise.

Next to them was Lieutenant Worth and his soldiers, while Sergeant Fallon and others led the advance and kept a bright lookout against running into an ambush, for Buffalo Bill had reported that he was sure the Indians were watching them, and if they had forces enough would attack them.

One thing was evident to all, and that was, they must get out of that land of peril with all haste; hence, as Mildred Lamar made no complaint, the march was kept up and continued late in the night.

All through that night Buffalo Bill and his scouts were sleepless, constantly scouting about the camp; but no disturbance came, and the next morning the march was again resumed for the fort.

CONCLUSION.

It was a wise thought of Buffalo Bill's to suggest to Lieutenant Worth to send to the hospital camp in the Canyon River Valley, for reinforcements to come out and meet them, and to have a courier sent from there on to the fort for further troops to also march to their relief, for, when still half-a-day's ride from the Overland trail, a large band of Indians, led by a white man who was known to be Captain Eagle, pressed forward to run down the little cavalcade.

But, just then, a bugle-call was heard, and some forty men from the hospital camp, arrived in time to check the charge of the Indians.

The latter were seen to send couriers to the rear to hasten on other bands of red-skins, and the result would have been a severe battle that might have been most disastrous to the retreating party, had not another force come up to their aid, those who had been sent out from Fort Advance.

There was a sharp fight, but the Indians were quickly put to flight, and the little band of heroes continued on their way, in safety, to the fort, where the welcome they met with from all is beyond description.

The sergeant's daughter was greeted by one and all, for her beauty and refinement made her at once a favorite with the colonel and his wife.

Mildred Lamar was warmly received for her brother's sake, as well as for the sufferings she had known, and which won the deep sympathy of all, who also knew that it was her warning to Buffalo Bill which had thwarted the Indians in their attack on the fort.

As for Buffalo Bill, he was the hero of the hour, and congratulated that the Red Hands had not carried out their threat of

DEATH TO BUFFALO BILL!

And he was also praised for having kept his word and hunted them to the bitter end.

THE END.

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